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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TECHNIQUE IN THE CANADIAN FICTION
OF MARGARET LAURENCE

by



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled Technique in the Canadian Fiction of Margaret Laurence, submitted by Leona Marie Gom in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Date

May 20, 1971

This thesis is dedicated
to my father.

ABSTRACT

This thesis will discuss the effectiveness of Laurence's novelistic technique in her four books of fiction set in Canada.

The first chapter deals with sources: the influence on Laurence's work of biblical archetypes, of the Presbyterian inheritance, of the basic symbols used, and of the physical setting of Manawaka and the city. The second chapter examines in detail her use of time. It considers her varying use of Erzählzeit and of flashbacks and selection to bridge the gap between the Erzählzeit and Erzählzeit; also it explores Laurence's use of tenses and the predominance of the present tense in the novels. Finally, it discusses the use of subjective time, relationships to the stream-of-consciousness novelists, and the use (or misuse) of the memory process and the double focus. The third chapter is concerned with Laurence's use of the first person: the problems of combining first-person narration with the present tense, the use of the unreliable narrator and the mirror image, and the use of self-irony.

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INTRODUCTION

Margaret Laurence's position as one of Canada's finest fiction writers can hardly be contested, and her career is far from over. She is a writer very much in the midst of her life's work, yet has produced a large enough body of work to justify comprehensive study. Her four works of fiction set in Canada, The Stone Angel (1964), A Jest of God (1966), The Fire-Dwellers (1969), and A Bird in the House (1970) show the confident development of the talent first displayed in her African novel, This Side Jordan (1960), and short stories, collected in The Tomorrow-Tamer (1964).

These latter two books have interesting parallels with Laurence's Canadian work, notably in the dependence the characters have on the tribal influence of their culture; as Hornsey explains, Laurence's characters, "whether African or Canadian, share a common anxiety which arises from a need to come to terms in the present with a tribal inheritance from the past."¹ The African stories, however, have been deliberately kept outside the scope of this thesis, and the discussions will deal with the fiction set in Canada which is bound together not only thematically but, to a large extent, stylistically as well.

It is the purpose of this thesis to discuss the effectiveness of Laurence's technique, particularly her technical use of time and person. Her sources, perhaps the most obvious common element shared by her Canadian fiction, are included in this study of her technique because they are practically inseparable from her choice of subject, and the sense of place--the Manawaka world--is especially important here. Laurence's use of time is discussed extensively in Chapter II, and although there is some overlap with Chapter III, which concerns her predominant use of the first person, it is necessary to discuss her use of time and of person separately to give the clearest and fullest criticism of both areas. The reason for the overlap arises from Laurence's frequent combination of present tense with first person, a combination which produces particular problems of its own. The two chapters are, it is hoped, adequately cross-referenced.

It should be noted here, too, that A Bird in the House is referred to throughout as a novel. Although it is, in the very strictest sense, a collection of short stories, separately published earlier in such magazines as Winter's Tales, Atlantic Advocate, and Chatelaine, most reviewers of the book have problems in defining its form, which, unlike The Tomorrow-Tamer, eludes categorization either as a novel or as short stories. The comments of Dobbs, Woodcock, and Thompson concerning this are given on page thirty-seven.

The collection, however, tracing as it does the growth of the child Vanessa, has many of the characteristics of a novel, and, had the stories not first appeared individually, there likely would have been no question that the eight "stories" would have simply been called "chapters" in a somewhat unconventional novel. There are enough common elements to suggest that what happens in one story is not meant to be taken in isolation from what happens in others. The very fact that the stories were published in the magazines in almost exactly the same order as they appear in A Bird in the House indicates that Laurence had a definite sequence of composition, and the appearance of the stories might almost be viewed as a serialization of one distinctly-unified work. The resulting collection does not, of course, result in a novel in the same sense as The Stone Angel, A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers are novels, and the problems involved in her use of such a form are discussed throughout this thesis.

CHAPTER I

SOURCES

It would be difficult to read Margaret Laurence's four Canadian novels without noticing the strong sense of background and place that permeates them. There exists in the novels a larger context than the lives of their individual characters, or even the pasts of these individual characters; and before Laurence's use of time in the novels is considered, it would be useful to examine this larger context of time and place in which her characters move. For throughout their length, the novels sound undeniably biblical, mythopoeic, historical, and geographical echoes.

Laurence would seem to accept Frye's statement that authors (poets) can hardly "find a literary theme that does not coincide with a myth;" in Laurence's case this would be predominantly a "Christian mythology."¹ Meyerhoff has a similar idea as to the significance of myth in literature. Agreeing with Mann that the myth is a "timeless schema," he says it is chosen as a literary symbol "to suggest, within a secular setting, a timeless perspective of looking upon the human situation; and to convey a sense of continuity and identification with mankind in general."² Mendilow refers to Jung's theories of archetypes, myths, and the collective unconscious, when, discussing Mann, he speaks of "recurrences

of a prototype pattern," and says, "each character is not only an individual living out his time but also one configuration of an endless series extending back to the dawn of humanity."³ And Laurence herself says that a writer is involved in an exploration not only "to understand one's background and one's past" but also "sometimes a more distant past which one has not personally experienced."⁴

It would do a serious injustice, of course, to Laurence's characters to see them purely as mythical figures doing, as Mendilow suggests, "what they do because it was done,"⁵ and losing their personal identities because they are so totally identified with an eternal human type. "You sense the symbols," says Laurence, but "it is something you don't analyse at the time."⁶ However, simply by her choice of names for two main characters, Hagar and Rachel, Laurence evokes their biblical namesakes, and suggests that they indeed should be regarded as "signifying a situation enduring outside place and time--even though they are expressed in the details of an individual character at a definite place and time."⁷

The influence of the Bible pervades all of Laurence's work but, as will be seen in her use of other aspects of time, it is The Stone Angel that offers the most rewarding study in this area. Both New and Thomas have emphasized the use of biblical archetypes in the novel. New draws such parallels as "the prairie in drought is a desert; Hagar is

called the Egyptian, Pharaoh's daughter; she wanders through wilderness; her relationship with Bram, her husband, is of the flesh--'his banner over me was his skin,' she says; and so on."⁸ And like Hagar the Egyptian, Hagar Shipley is the second wife of her husband; she resents the memory of Clara as much as the earlier Hagar resents Sarah;⁹ she, like the other Hagar, bears her husband an Ishmael, the homeless outcast. And Hagar, like her namesake, wanders blindly in a wilderness, but one of her own making. "Pride," she says, "was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear. I was alone, never anything else, and never free, for I carried my chains within me, and they spread out from me and shackled all I touched."¹⁰ Thus Hagar, like the bondswoman Hagar, is not free, and when she at last realizes that "I must always, always, have wanted that--simply to rejoice" (SA, 292), but that "I never could," it is perhaps the moment of greatest tragedy in the novel. It is likely, however, that her inability to rejoice, to fling aside her chains, is due, as she says, to her pride and to the strength of her individual character rather than, as New suggests, to a mere reincarnation of a biblical archetype: "Joy is for the Sarahs of the world; but she is Hagar. Her identity will not allow it."¹¹ It might be more correct to say that Hagar Shipley's identity will not allow her to be bound to any Procrustean bed of "types." She is, above all, an individual. Laurence herself supports this view, saying, "I

wrote about Hagar as one individual old woman who certainly came out of my own background. But I was astonished when a number of other Canadians wrote to me or said to me that this was their grandmother. And you didn't know that it was going to turn out to be everybody's grandmother."¹²

New is correct, however, in recognizing the tragedy of Hagar's situation, for only when it is too late, when she has lost Bram and John, does she see the truth. Nor does the harsh God of the Hebrews offer her any help, and unlike the earlier Hagar, she hears no angel console her in the wilderness and promise her the safety of her lost son.¹³ Read parallels her tragedy to that of Lear, and even suggests that "into the blackness of her night comes a fool--a vague parallel, perhaps, but a parallel none the less of Lear's fool--a tippling insurance salesman, Murray F. Lees."¹⁴ Whether or not one accepts Read's "vague parallel," there is little doubt that to Hagar, "as she listens and as she receives from him understanding and kindness, comes understanding of self and the realization that tragedy is the common lot of man."¹⁵ And it enables her to make a final gesture of love, and to, at last, rejoice: "Listening, I feel it is more than I could now reasonably have expected out of life, for he has spoken with such anger and such tenderness" (SA, 305).

Although The Stone Angel has the most obvious parallels with a biblical past, it is also suggested in A Jest of

God, albeit more subtly. Compare these verses from Genesis with a crucial passage from A Jest of God:

And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.

And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel: and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?¹⁶

'If I had a child, I would like it to be yours.'

This seems so unforced that I feel he must see it the way I do. And so restrained, as well, when I might have torn at him--Give me my children.

His flesh, his skin, his bones, his blood--all are still connected with mine, but now suddenly not. Not a muscular withdrawal. Something different, something unsuspected.

His face turns away from mine. He puts his mouth momentarily on my shoulder. Then, still not looking at me, he brushes a hand across my forehead.

'Darling,' he says, 'I'm not God. I can't solve anything.'¹⁷

There is nothing of the mythological complexity of The Stone Angel in A Jest of God, and the parallel between the two Rachels is relatively undeveloped, although, in light of what happens elsewhere in the novel, highly ironical. Not only is Nick not God (in fact, his name suggests he is the exact opposite!), he is a strange Jacob indeed, willing to sell back his birthright to his brother if only he could. The most obvious irony, however, arises out of the unexpected "fruit of the womb" Rachel bears. Stedmond, speaking of the images of "death and sterility" in the novel, suggests that Rachel's fear of pregnancy "is perhaps an ironical contrapuntal allusion to her Biblical namesake's longing for a child, as, possibly, is the frustrating of her eventual desire to give birth when her 'baby' turns out (a trifle too pat for

the purposes of the plot) to be a tumour, albeit benign."¹⁸ The solution of Rachel's "pregnancy" may indeed be contrived for purposes of the plot, but it does present a further "death-instead-of-life" irony; whereas God sends to the biblical Rachel fertility, to Rachel Cameron, "mourning for her children" (JG, 181), He sends a symbol of death.

There is another ironical parallel between the Rachel of Genesis and the Rachel of A Jest of God, and that lies in the words, "Rachel envied her sister." Rachel Cameron indeed envies Stacey her children and her security, yet in light of The Fire-Dwellers her envy is more ironical even than that of the biblical Rachel for her sister Leah. Leah, however, is no prototype for Stacey, and neither The Fire-Dwellers nor A Bird in the House suggest any sort of biblical models, at least not in the way that the other two novels do. There are, however, frequent allusions to a Christian background, to the influence of a biblical past: "The roots vanish, because they don't end with Matthew, even if it were possible to trace them that far. They go back and back forever. Our father Adam."¹⁹

Yet both novels tend to deal more with a disintegration of a Christian faith than in a reaffirmation of its influence. The Christian faith that is rejected, however, is of a particular kind: the Calvinist-Presbyterian religion of Laurence's own background, whose God, as Hornsey says, is a jealous one, demanding "hard work, discretion and moderation"²⁰

in order "that man redeem himself in return for happiness and salvation."²¹ That religion for Laurence's characters comes to represent a burden, something inimical to personal freedom, is thus easy to understand, and the inhibiting effect of such a religious inheritance functions, as Hornsey concludes, "as a skull beneath the skin which must be articulated, felt, recognized--before any semblance of freedom can be achieved."²² What the characters do during the novels, however, is consciously discard this harsh god of their parents or grandparents, and although it is possible to see the novels as their protagonists' movement toward a new understanding of God, and hence of themselves, it is also apparent that the characters throughout tend to voice Laurence's own views of religion. Like the author, they may have "some kind of faith, but not with a traditional church," and "the myths and rituals of religion" become merely "reassuring to the human spirit."²³

Stacey certainly might share this view. Spettigue notes concerning her belief that "although Stacey is too down-to-earth to be religious--she is embarrassed every Sunday when her ex-minister father-in-law queries the children's absence from church--she finds in time of crisis that she reverts to a simpler ethos and calls on God. The god she dialogues with, argues and makes bargains with in an Old Testament way is also herself."²⁴ Stacey indeed "calls on God," but it is doubtful if she really believes anyone other

than herself is listening. Certainly, her bitterness at her "accumulation of years," at the loss of that time "when flesh and love were indestructible" (FD, 73), is indicative of the fact that she has no sustaining Christian faith in an after-life, nor in Browning's optimism that "the best is yet to be" and that

Our times are in His hand
 Who saith, "A whole I planned,
 Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid!"²⁵

Her greatest problem lies in accepting her mortality, in reconciling the truth of "I won't be twenty-one again" (FD, 308) with the belief that "everything will be fine when I'm eighteen again" (FD, 175). Her fear of dying arises both from a sense of futility in her present and a fear of the nothingness beyond death:

--Sometimes a person feels that something else must have been meant to happen in your own life, or is this all there's ever going to be, just like this? Until I die. What'll it be like to die? Not able to breathe? Fighting for air? Or letting everything slide away, seeing shapes like shadows that used to be people, nothing real because in a minute you won't be real any more? Holy Mary, Mother of God, be with me now and in the hour of my death. If only I could say that, but no. (FD, 129)

Vanessa likewise, even as a child, comes to reject religious belief, comes to learn what "rest beyond the river" really means: "I knew now what that meant. It meant Nothing. It meant only silence, forever."²⁶ Thus she can say coldly to Noreen about her father that "he is not in Heaven, because there is no Heaven. And it doesn't matter, see? It doesn't matter!" (BH, 110) And although she admits later

that "despite what I had said to Noreen, it did matter," she accepts, too, that what she had said was true, that "it mattered, but there was no help for it" (BH, 110).

A Jest of God and The Stone Angel also suggest an inability to accept orthodox Christianity. Rachel has lived all her life in an atmosphere of death and decay, the funeral parlor run by her father a constant reminder of man's mortality. Thinking of her father, she wonders if he believed that the dead had "found by now all there was--oblivion. Undoubtedly he did think so. Immortality would have appalled him, perhaps as much as it does me" (JG, 41). For Rachel, then, her mother's bland religion, with its "pretty and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently" (JG, 41), has become meaningless, and she goes to church only to please her mother, because she cannot tell her that "God hadn't died recently, within the last few years, but a long time ago, longer than I could remember, for I could not actually recall a time when He was alive" (JG, 39). In contrast to the insipid Presbyterian church is Calla's Tabernacle, which, Rachel says, has "too much gaudiness and zeal" (JG, 41)--so much, in fact, that she is swept along with its cathartic enthusiasm and becomes, herself, the voice of the ecstatic utterances she dreads in Calla. It is quite possible that, as Hornsey says, "the God of the tabernacle is the Presbyterian God--the only difference lies in how he is perceived;"²⁷ however, both perceptions are rejected by Rachel, and the freedom

she finally discovers is based on neither of these definitions of God, but rather on a much more realistic understanding of the inhibiting influence of her past. In the excellent scene with Hector, which Laurence treats with a Waugh-like black humor, Rachel, as Hornsey notes, "now prefers to look at the skull and to dispose of the undertaker's art, the fictional mottoes, the social facades--and attempt to see life and death as it really is."²⁸

Clara Thomas observes that the resolution of Rachel's story "comes existentially, out of her life's own present confusion," and in strictly Old Testament terms.²⁹ Certainly Rachel does assume responsibility for sorting out her life, and although she remains wandering in the wilderness from which Hagar frees herself, the novel ends with at least the sighting of a path. Thomas' explanation of the resolution of Hagar's story, however, is more questionable. Hagar resolves her life, Thomas says, in purely Christian terms, in a New Testament sense, as opposed to Rachel's solution of it in her own terms. Yet certainly Hagar, although she realizes that "time has folded in like a paper fan" (SA, 90), refuses to accept the easy Christian answers that Mr. Troy offers. "Each day, so worthless really, has a rarity for me lately," she says (SA, 5). As she watches the patterns the clouds make, she thinks: "How I shall hate to go away for good. . . . Saint John of Patmos can keep his sequined heaven, or share it with Mr. Troy, for all I care, and spend

eternity in fingering the gems and telling each other gleefully they're worth a fortune" (SA, 120). Hagar, solidly rooted in this world, clings to it as tenaciously as she clings to her pride. Even "harder to bear" than Matt's death was why he hadn't "writhed, cursed, at least grappled with the thing" (SA, 60). And when, at the seashore, she thinks of willing her heart to "cross over," she rejects the thought immediately with the realization that "I'd not willingly hasten the moment by as much as the span of a breath" (SA, 192). Even as she realizes she is dying, she refuses to beg for God's mercy: "Ought I to appeal? It's the done thing. Our Father--no. I want no part of that. All I can think is--Bless me or not, Lord, just as You please, for I'll not beg" (SA, 307). Hagar, then, remains to the end raging "against the dying of the light," and if she finds another light beyond, it certainly would not be the pastel heaven, full of humble and pious souls, of which Mr. Troy told her. It is more in humanistic than in theological terms that she makes her peace with herself--and although it is possible that the glass of water she wrests from the nurse is, as Thomas says, "the cup of life, the grace of God,"³⁰ it is not clear that Hagar actually drinks the water. She herself must be given credit for her understandings. Even as she forged her own chains, she, at the end, breaks them.

The Stone Angel and A Jest of God also make use of the "Christian mythology" in another significant way: in the predominant symbols or recurring images of the two novels, these being explicitly stated in the titles. The symbols are, interestingly enough, not what Brown calls "fixed" symbols, which are "very close to explicit statement," but they tend to be "expanding" symbols, which are more appropriate for "rendering an emotion, an idea, that by its largeness or its subtlety cannot become wholly explicit."³¹ The symbol of the stone angel³² especially evidences this complexity, this accretion of "meaning from the succession of contexts in which it occurs."³³ The novel opens with a description of the stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery, an angel who "viewed the town with sightless eyes. She was doubly blind, not only stone but unendowed with even a pretense of sight" (SA, 3). The angel at this point is presented merely as a monument to Hagar's mother, bought by her father "in pride to mark her bones and proclaim her dynasty" (SA, 3). As the story proceeds, it becomes apparent that the angel is more than a symbol of her father's pride, and it becomes representative of Hagar herself, of her own blindness in dealing with those she loves. Only when it is too late, when Bram lies dying, does she begin to understand him, and herself, and to feel "anger--not at anyone, at God, perhaps, for giving us eyes but almost never sight" (SA, 173). The stone angel as symbol expands even more significantly in the scene

with Hagar and John in the cemetery, as John strains to up-raise the angel that, it is suggested, he himself pushed down and defaced: "I wish he could have looked like Jacob then, wrestling with the angel and besting it, wringing a blessing from it with his might. But no" (SA, 179). John remains always the Ishmael, the outcast, and it is only when Hagar realizes that it is Marvin, her other son, who is the true Jacob, and for whom she is cast as the angel, that she can free herself: "Now it seems to me he is truly Jacob, gripping with all his strength, and bargaining. I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And I see I am thus strangely cast, and perhaps have been so from the beginning, and can only release myself by releasing him."³⁴ And when Hagar sees the stone angel for the last time, it again becomes identifiable with her, the "sadly altered" Egyptian; like her, it had "altered . . . and . . . stood askew and tilted," looking forward to the day when it would "topple entirely" (SA, 305). And when, finally, Hagar, lying in the hospital and dubiously imagining herself an angel, wonders, "can angels faint?" the reader can visualize for himself the sort of secular angel she might be: in no sequined heaven, but wearing the lipstick flush of the stone angel on her cheeks--perhaps no longer stone, and with eyes that see.

The major symbolism of the other novels generally lacks the fine complexity of The Stone Angel. A Jest of

God, however, uses the interesting image of the Old Testament God as a joker, a cruel jester. It is an image that recurs both in The Stone Angel and in The Fire-Dwellers. "I've often wondered why one discovers so many things so late. The jokes of God," says Hagar (SA, 60). "God has a sick sense of humor, if you ask me," says Stacey (FD, 75). Rachel, overly-conscious of the fact that she is an old maid, a jest of God, says, "If I believed, I would have to detest God for the brutal joker He would be if He existed" (JG, 42). She does not share the desperate faith in God's justice that Mink Snopes in The Mansion has: "Old Moster jest punishes; He don't play jokes."³⁵ For Rachel, "Old Moster" does play jokes, for he is the God who speaks through the voice of Wisdom in Proverbs: "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your fear cometh."³⁶ God laughs not only because Rachel is an old maid, but because she has rejected him, and her thinking of herself as a jest of God and a fool easily follows God's words in Psalms: "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God."³⁷ Rachel, then, is, both in her rejection of God and in her fearing of him, a fool, as she admits near the end of the novel: "Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque lightheadedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one" (JG, 181). Rachel's "if-He-existed" God indeed has mocked her fears throughout, but the image of this laughing God expands significantly in the final lines

of the novel, when Rachel no longer views herself with the earlier bitterness, but, almost like Macleish's J.B., comes, with a new compassion, to forgive this cruel God: "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God" (JG 202).

The major symbol in A Bird in the House, also expressed in the title, departs from the tendency of the other two novels to use expanding symbols. The Stone Angel uses the saying as well, and the symbol never departs from this simple equation: "A bird in the house means death in the house" (SA, 217). There is, however, in A Bird in the House, considerable foreshadowing, by the use of bird images, of the death of Vanessa's father. The image is innocently introduced in "To Set Our House in Order," when Vanessa listens to the "night murmurings" of the house, imagining a sparrow might have "flown into the attic through the broken skylight there" (BH, 41). She notes on the carpet "birds in eternal motionless flight" (BH, 43); as she suddenly fears her mother might die, she holds "the feather duster like a dead bird" (BH, 49-50), and later in her dreams she says, "I could hear the caught sparrow fluttering in the attic, and the sound of my mother crying, and the voices of the dead children" (BH, 53). And in "Mask of the Bear," the image of the caged canary is associated with Grandmother Connor's death (BH, 83). Thus, when the chapter titled "A Bird in the House" follows, the image has already been

thoroughly evoked, and it is no surprise when Noreen directly links it with death (BH, 102-3), nor when Vanessa's father dies and she recalls the bird: "Looking at Noreen now, I suddenly recalled the sparrow. I felt physically sick, remembering the fearful darting and plunging of those wings, and the fact that it was I who had opened the window and let it in" (BH, 109). The "bird-in-the-house equals death" symbolism is certainly overworked, yet achieves an interesting emphasis when it is so closely linked with Vanessa's rejection of orthodox religion, which also occurs right after her father's death. Nevertheless, the bird remains throughout what Brown calls a "fixed symbol," which is "almost entirely repetition."³⁸ A much less static use of the bird-in-the-house symbol occurs in Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England, when one of the king's nobles uses the image of the sparrow flying through the house to represent the length of man's mortal life. The sparrow, he says, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, into the dark winter from which he emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant.³⁹

The main symbol in The Fire-Dwellers, the burning house motif, is somewhat less fixed than that of A Bird in the House, and expands in meaning as the story proceeds. There is an especially ironic expansion suggested in the reference to St. Paul, who, Stacey ponders, "didn't say

what to do if you married and burned" (FD, 211). The basic symbol, however, is not of Christian origin, and suggests another interesting, if less significant, source aside from the Bible for the rather epigrammatic statements of theme that Laurence so frequently uses: this is nursery rhymes. Biblical quotations used in this way are fairly common; A Bird in the House has Vanessa report back from Sunday school: "How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle" (BH, 7); or has Grandmother MacLeod cite her biblical platitudes: "What happens is God's will. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" (BH, 45). A particularly effective example of this dramatic capturing of a vaguely-felt theme in a biblical passage occurs in The Fire-Dwellers as Matthew says to Stacey, right after her encounter with Buckle: "Save me, O God, for the waters are come in unto my soul" (FD, 164).

The use of nursery rhymes, particularly in The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God, similarly presents such statements of theme, and both novels open with rhymes which become significant motifs throughout the novels. For Stacey it is the ominous rhyme that warns: "Your house is on fire,/ Your children are gone," and it recurs dramatically much later in the book when Luke repeats it to her, and the words "ladybird, ladybird" echo accusingly in her mind as she rushes back home (FD, 230). As she rides with Buckle and begins to fear what will happen, her thoughts are interrupted by these lines: "The house is burning. Everything

and everyone in it. Nothing can put out the flames. The house wasn't fire-resistant. One match was all it took" (FD, 153). Stacey's house is indeed on fire, for she is, after all, a "fire-dweller," and if she learns anything by the end of the book, it is that the fire will not totally consume her, and that she is only one of many people living in a Heraclitus world of burning houses. A Jest of God also opens with a nursery rhyme, one which Rachel hears as "Rachel Cameron says she'll die/For the want of the golden city" (JG, 1). The thematic significance of the lines is obvious; Rachel is dying, stifled, in Manawaka, and it is only when she at last departs for the "golden city" that some light filters through the darkness of her days. There is evoked, through the use of such rhymes, a sense of an endless past, of a tradition going back so far that, as Stacey says, "the roots vanish," and as Rachel says:

People forget the songs, later on, but the knowledge of them must be passed like a secret language from child to child--how far back? They seem like a different race, a separate species, all those generations of children. As though they must still exist somewhere

Nebuchadnezzar, King of the Jews,
Sold his wife for a pair of shoes.

I can imagine that one going back and back, through time and languages. Chanted in Latin, maybe, the same high sing-song voices, smug little Roman girls. (JG, 1-2)

This sense of past generations, of roots, is indeed strong in Laurence, and it is not merely the use of biblical archetypes, Christian allusions or nursery rhymes that indicates this. Her novels also show a strong sense of the

specific historical past, and of a pioneering heritage. There may be something of a Reverend Hightower (from Faulkner's Light in August) in Laurence's characters, for even as Hightower, although he was born after the Civil War, could still hear the clatter of horses' hooves and see great swirls of dust, so do Laurence's heroines still live in the shadows of not only their own immediate pasts but the struggles of their ancestors. Laurence admits the influence in her novels of this spirit arising out of her own past, a past from which she wishes to free herself, while "at the same time beginning to see its true value."⁴⁰ She had, she says, "to begin approaching my background and my past through my grandparents' generation, the generation of pioneers of Scots Presbyterian origin, who had been among the first to people the town I called Manawaka. This was where my own roots began."⁴¹ And it was only, she says, after writing The Stone Angel that she recognized her mixed feelings towards that generation--"how difficult they were to live with, how authoritarian, how unbending, how afraid to show love, many of them, and how willing to show anger. And yet--they had inhabited a wilderness and made it fruitful. They were, in the end, great survivors, and for that I love and value them."⁴² Thus, when Bram says he wants a son because "it would be somebody to leave the place to," although Hagar realizes only "with amazement" that "he wanted his dynasty no less than my father had" (SA, 101), for Laurence and the reader

there is no amazement at such a desire. It is not only a natural desire for self-perpetuation, but a desire to establish and preserve one's roots in the land, to "inhabit a wilderness and make it fruitful."

The roots, however, that pioneers like Bram and Hagar try to establish grow not merely in "a wilderness," but in a very specific wilderness, one that is tamed, to which sacrifices are made, and out of which is hewn the town of Manawaka. "Writing," says Laurence, "for me, has to be set firmly in some soil, some place, some outer and inner reality."⁴³ For her Canadian fiction this is her home town of Neepawa, and from the literal reality of Neepawa to the fictional reality of Manawaka ("an Indian-sounding name that I made up when I was a teen-ager"⁴⁴) is a small and obvious step. A Bird in the House is, she admits, largely autobiographical; "a good deal of what happens in the stories . . . did in fact happen to me as a child."⁴⁵ Laurence assures us, however, that Neepawa is not synonymous with Manawaka, although the similarities are there. But Manawaka is, as Thomas says, "fictionally real," with "the hard surfaces and sharp outlines of a place in time and space, furnished with a density of sense-gratifying detail fitting to its place, its times and its seasons. Beyond that, it is timeless in its reference."⁴⁶ Manawaka and the land around it are predominant in all four of Laurence's novels except The Fire-Dwellers, and even though its fictional

present is set in Vancouver, Stacey is as much a product of her small-town background as is her sister, or Hagar, or Vanessa; scenes from her childhood continually juxtapose Manawaka with Vancouver.

Laurence's attitude to Manawaka and its surrounding farmland, however, is a most complex one. There is, certainly, considerable truth in this comment in an article in Edge: "the gigantism and hostility of a nature which tends to be mythologized and endowed with godlike, malevolent traits, . . . the pathetic quality of the individual surrounded by a hostile or indifferent universe . . . , the imagery of violence, sharpness and cold--these [themes] indeed dominate our literature."⁴⁷ Thomas seems to think that Laurence shares this attitude. In comparing Laurence's feeling for the land to Willa Cather's, she says that whereas Cather finds "a sense of benign continuity in the land itself,"⁴⁸ in Laurence, whenever such feelings appear, they are disappointed, for the land "demanded battle and did not repay love."⁴⁹ It might be possible to conclude, then, that Laurence regards the landscape as repressive and inhibiting, and its influence as ultimately undesirable.

Such a conclusion might not be unwarranted, were it not for two further considerations: her actual treatment of nature in the novels, and her attitude to the small town and to the city. The natural world--and here a sharp distinction must be made, as Thomas does not make, between it and the

more obviously destructive small-town environment--is almost always treated with a particular sense of love and lyricism. Vanessa, a "town kid," becomes aware of the beauty of the natural world around her, especially in "Horses of the Night," when she goes to the country with Chris. Although at first she feels the lake represents something "distant, indestructible, totally indifferent" (BH, 148), she envies her cousin's familiarity with it, and her own descriptions vary from the respectful to the appreciative. At the lake she notes the "green rushes like floating meadows in which the water birds nested" (BH, 147), and the scents in the hay "of grass and dust and wild mint" (BH, 148). Rachel has a similar love for nature; she finds where "the crocuses were growing, the flowers' faint mauve protected by the green-grey hairs of the outer petals" (JG, 79); the first time she has sex with Nick, it is in a natural setting, and she observes the willows growing beside the Wackakwa, "and their languid branches bend and almost touch the amber water swifting over the pebbles" (JG, 85). Likewise, Stacey flees to the seashore, to the natural world, to have her brief affair with Luke, and her memories of her earlier sexual encounters are also usually close to nature. Remembering herself swimming at Diamond Lake, she remembers "feeling already the pressure on her lake-covered thighs of the boys" (FD, 174); thinking of the airman from Montreal, she recalls reaching "the leaf-blanketed hillside. Feeling the

tacit agreement of the forest for their unspoken plans" (FD, 74-5). And the lake holiday with Mac also transforms their sexual relationship into some pastoral idyll, with "the pine and spruce harps in the black ground outside" (FD, 138). Hagar, too, feels strongly attached to the natural beauties of the land; indeed, it is her love of these that makes her scorn the "sequined heaven" of Mr. Troy. Amid the harshness of the Shipley place, the lilacs, vivid in Hagar's memory, still grew, "with no care given them, and in the early summer they hung like bunches of wild mauve grapes from branches with leaves like dark green hearts, and the scent of them was so bold and sweet you could smell nothing else, a seasonal mercy" (SA, 29).

The "seasonal mercy" of the land, then, mitigates its harshness, and in each of Laurence's novels this benevolent sense of the pastoral is, if not pervasive, undeniably present. Perhaps the more stultifying influence is Manawaka itself, that archetypal small town of Lewis' Main Street, so inimical to the individual's growth. It is the small town, where "nothing is old . . . but it looks old" (JG, 10), in which Rachel stagnates, that tends to turn Vanessa into a snob, that Stacey escapes, and that moulds the young, unyielding Hagar.

It is significant, then, that all four of Laurence's characters leave the insular and isolated Manawaka. They listen, like Stacey, to the voices of the trains that urge, "get up and get out of this town" (FD, 33); they are not

left, like David Canaan, as "the smoke of the train settled behind them and the train of your own life went by and left you standing there in the field."⁵⁰ "The city," which seems to be Vancouver, becomes their new environment, demanding a different kind of sacrifice.

The place of the city in literature today is an inevitable one; as Bellow says, "the world is too much with us, and there has never been so much world."⁵¹ If, then, the city has become the dominant, and dominating, environment for the modern individual, it follows that, as Galloway says, "no longer does the American innocent go abroad or to the wilderness for his experiences, but into the heart of the city itself."⁵² Laurence's characters do not, in the progress of the novels themselves, go "into the heart of the city" to find themselves, but each novel, with the obvious exception of The Stone Angel, ends with the characters doing so. However, the city is treated, in The Stone Angel and The Fire-Dwellers, the two novels which are set there, with what has become an almost-expected disparagement, likely reflecting Laurence's own preference to live outside a city: "I can live in a city for a while, but eventually it really bugs me."⁵³ Stacey sees the city both as "solid and self-confident" and also "broken like vulnerable live bones" (FD, 11); she wonders if there is "no other facet to the city-face" (FD, 90), and notes the contrasting quiet on the beach, where it is "good to hear nothing, no voices" (FD, 171). Hagar, unused

to the city, sees it only as a contrast to the other world of space and time she inhabits, and on her one expedition out she sees the bus depot only as a place where "millions of people are yelling and running, toting suitcases" (SA, 147). It is unlikely, then, that Laurence has intended her novels to be to any significant extent a comment on the rural-urban question (although The Fire-Dwellers might be read as such), and while she suggests it is in the city that her characters must live in the future, she neither particularly condemns nor lauds the urban jungle. It is simply another milieu, one that, if not preferable to the country, does seem more promising than the small town. Perhaps it is more accurate to have her characters say with Wolfe: "I shall find no door in any city. But in the city of myself, upon the continent of my soul, I shall find the forgotten language, the lost world, a door where I may enter."⁵⁴

Hagar, indeed, suggests that the answers are less to be found in the city than in herself, and also in the things that have become extensions of herself. Looking around at her Vancouver house, she admits it may not really be home, since "only the first of all," her prairie home, now forever lost, "can be truly that;" yet she sees that in this house "my shreds and remnants of years are scattered through it visibly in lamps and vases," benches, chairs, and cabinets, and she realizes "I couldn't leave them. If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of

all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purposes, then I do not know where I am to be found at all" (SA, 36). It is a feeling, then, of being "contained" in her memory-filled possessions, of being defined by tangible objects around her, that gives Hagar a sense of identity. The world beyond the room is not as important as that world within the room from which Hagar's mental time-machine receives its impulses. Hagar's feeling of clinging to her possessions as to some immutable part of herself is strangely similar to what Sartre's Roquentin says:

People are in their houses They live in the midst of legacies, gifts, each piece of furniture holds a memory. Clocks, medallions, portraits, shells, paper weights, screens, shawls. They have closets full of bottles, stuffs, old clothes, newspapers; they have kept everything. The past is a landlord's luxury.

Where shall I keep mine? You don't put your past in your pocket; you have to have a house. I have only my body: a man entirely alone, with his lonely body, cannot indulge in memories; they pass through him. I shouldn't complain: all I wanted was to be free.⁵⁵

Hagar has the same fear of losing these objects around her and consequently losing her sense of herself and her past, which reside in them. Yet she is no Miss Havisham living in a world of decay and stopped clocks; her possessions do not stop her from enjoying the present moment. It is Rachel who seems to be more tied by the things around her to an unfruitful past. Note her description of her bedroom: "This bedroom is the same I've always had. I should change the furniture. How girlish it is, how old-fashioned. The white spindly-legged dressing-table, the round mirror with

white rose-carved frame, the white-painted metal bed" (JG, 16). Like Carol Kennicott, Rachel feels, for somewhat similar reasons, the furniture "condemning her to death by smothering."⁵⁶ Of all Laurence's characters, Rachel is the most oppressed by her small-town past, and present, and only by leaving it, by surrounding herself with new furniture, can there be any hope for her future.

Yet, as Hornsey points out, that Rachel takes "her mother with her when she leaves Manawaka . . . suggests that like Nathaniel Amegbe, she is wise enough to know that the past can never be totally discarded."⁵⁷ Manawaka will always be a part of Rachel, as it will always be a part of Hagar and Stacey and Vanessa, and this past hangs heavy and inexorable in each of the novels. "Nothing can take away those years," says Hagar (SA, 292); "the past doesn't ever seem to be over," says Stacey (FD, 258); "no one in Manawaka ever dies," says Rachel (JG, 13); "that house in Manawaka . . . I carry with me," says Vanessa (BH, 3). There is a strong sense in which Laurence's characters could each say of Manawaka, as Vanessa says of her grandfather, "I had feared and fought the old man, yet he proclaimed himself in my veins" (BH, 207). Manawaka may be left behind physically but there is, as Laurence says of herself, "a kind of spiritual return;"⁵⁸ certainly for Stacey and Hagar and Vanessa, living in the city has not erased their memories of Manawaka, which remain as vivid as the city present. George Webber may learn that

"you can't go home again," that "this little town, and the immortal hills around it" are a home to which he can never return,⁵⁹ but for Laurence this past can never be completely abandoned. "People always want to get out," she says, "and yet profoundly want to return. . . . But whether or not they return in the flesh is not important."⁶⁰ What Laurence has learned, apparently, is that the small town will always be a part of her; and what her characters learn is that, before they can survive in the city, they must come to terms with the Manawaka in themselves, with the tribal influence of the small town and their own Scots-Presbyterian inheritance. "Tribalism," says Laurence, "is not such a bad thing, if seen as the bond an individual feels with his roots, his ancestors, his background. It may or may not be stultifying in a personal sense, but it is a problem each of us has to solve or not solve."⁶¹

What the characters must also do is come to terms with time. "Logically the individual, particular case is defined by reference to two coordinates, space and time," says Watt.⁶² The "space" is Manawaka, where the characters, with the weight of their inherited pasts, are defined; the "time," both the characters' personal definitions of it and Laurence's technical use of it within the novels, is the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER II

THE USE OF TIME

The time element in fiction is one of obvious importance, for it determines to a large degree the author's choice of subject, its form and his general technique. The novelist, unhampered by such restrictions as the Aristotelian unities which for so long fettered drama, is free to do with time whatever he wishes, and it is not surprising that many of the most experimental novels were really experiments with the uses of time. Gertrude Stein says that "composition is time that is the reason that at present the time-sense is troubling that is the reason why at present the time-sense in the composition is the composition that is making what there is in the composition."¹ Henry James, too, recognizes the significance of the time-sense as an influence on novelistic technique: "This eternal time question is accordingly, for the novelist, always there and always formidable; always insisting on the effect of the great lapse and passage, of the 'dark backward and abysm,' by the terms of truth, and on the effect of compression, of composition and form, by the terms of literary arrangement."² Laurence has a similar sense of the importance of time in composition, and her four Canadian novels are as dependent on the function of time within them as they are dependent on the function of place.

There are, of course, various ways of examining time-usage in a novel, and of distinguishing between kinds of time. This chapter will deal with four such distinctions, which are made primarily to explain Laurence's use of time and not to provide any comprehensive schema. The first part will deal with the distinction between the reading time of the novel and the length of time covered in the novel, a distinction which takes into account the reader's response, and, in Laurence's case, the use of the flashback. Part two will discuss the actual tenses used in the novels; part three will consider Laurence's use of subjective time as present, and part four will involve a discussion of subjective time as memory.

1. Erzählzeit and Flashbacks

Perhaps the most obvious distinction between kinds of time is that between actual reading time (Erzählzeit) and the length of time covered by the novel (Erzählzeit), or, as Mendilow calls it, "the chronological duration of the reading" and the "fictional time."³ Thomas Mann makes the same distinction in The Magic Mountain. "A narrative," he says,

must have two kinds of time: first its own, like music, actual time [ihre eigene, die musikalisch-reale], conditioning its presentation and course; and second, the time of its content, which is relative [die ihres Inhalts, die perspektivisch ist], so extremely relative that the imaginary time of the narrative can either coincide nearly or completely with the actual, or musical, time, or can be a world away.⁴

Proust recognizes a similar discrepancy between this Erzählzeit and Erzähltezeit when he remarks in Remembrance of Things Past that, to make the flight of time perceptible, "novelists are obliged, by wildly accelerating the beat of the pendulum, to transport the reader in a couple of minutes over ten, or twenty, or even thirty years. At the top of one page we have left a lover full of hope; at the foot of the next we meet him again, a bowed old man of eighty."⁵ Laurence takes exactly such liberties with time, and with Hagar, for instance, in The Stone Angel, the reader is frequently transported "in a couple of minutes over ten, or twenty, or even thirty years." In The Stone Angel, however, it is significant that the reader is transported both forwards and backwards in time, and since the reader spends almost as much reading time with Hagar when she moves backward in time as when she moves forward, it may be debatable just what the Erzähltezeit of the novel is. Although the novel covers, in terms of actual chronological events, only two or three weeks, the reader participates so frequently in the childhood and earlier adulthood of the main character that it is possible to say that the actual Erzähltezeit or fictional time is about ninety years.

A Bird in the House also suggests an interesting variation in the calculation of its Erzähltezeit. Vanessa progresses from a child to a woman of forty, and the fictional time covered is thus about thirty years. In each of

the individual stories, however, the Erzählzeit varies considerably. Few stories, such as "The Sound of the Singing," deal with only one day in Vanessa's life, and the later stories stretch from an Erzählzeit of twelve years ("Horses of the Night") to about thirty years ("Jericho's Brick Battlement"). Significantly, however, there is frequent overlap of the Erzählzeit in different stories; for example, where "A Bird in the House" deals mostly with the death of Vanessa's father and leaves us with Vanessa at seventeen, the next story, "The Loons," is set mostly in the time before his death but moves in the last few pages to Vanessa at eighteen. And the last story begins with the narration of an event that had occurred four stories before.

Compared to the more complex use of fictional time in The Stone Angel and A Bird in the House, the Erzählzeit of A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers is much easier to ascertain. Both Rachel and Stacey move chronologically through three or four months of their lives, and any movement into the past is not sustained enough to suggest that the Erzählzeit should be longer.

At any rate, whether the Erzählzeit is ninety years or a few months, a discrepancy is still involved between it and the Erzählzeit, which is only a few hours for each book. This short reading time enables the author to assume, as Harvey says, "that at a single reading the reader is a constant confronted by variables; that is, by the

different characters presented to him which he will hold together within a unified act of attention."⁶ However, although Laurence thus does not need to consider the reader's "changing, multiple viewpoints" which a longer Erzählzeit would involve, she is necessarily conscious of the selection and compression necessary to present her changing characters in a limited reading time. "The problem of form," she says, "is always the problem of selection--how to discover the structure which will provide the best skeleton for this particular flesh and will help to make the process of selection more possible."⁷

Laurence confronts the problem by presenting, in each of her novels, some alternative to the more traditional linear progression used, for example, by Frederick Philip Grove in Settlers of the Marsh. Grove, faced with the problem of covering a seventeen-year span in chronological narration,⁸ winds up with a wearying employment of open-ended sentences terminating in a series of dots, an over-use of breaks (two or three per page are common), and a frequent use of such brief statements as "a winter in town, to learn English....Another summer. A second winter with Nelson...." to bridge gaps between significant events. Strangely enough, it is A Bird in the House, Laurence's last book, that is closest to Grove's method, moving ahead chronologically in each of the stories, magnifying the high spots of Vanessa's life and practically ignoring the links between them. Why

Laurence can succeed at all with such a method is explained by her short-story format, resulting in the kind of hybrid that Dobbs calls "not so much a collection of short stories as a novel with the boring bits left out;"⁹ that Woodcock wonders whether to define "as a collection of tales or as a loosely knit and unconventional novel,"¹⁰ and that Thompson calls a "whole-book," in which "some stories re-examine the same chronological period as other stories, but examine them with a new focus and a different pattern of events."¹¹ Thus Laurence selects various "highs" in Vanessa's life, deals with them predominantly in one story or chapter, but may refer to them later from another perspective.

The easiest way, of course, to avoid any such problems of selection and compression is to restrict the fictional time covered and to present any necessary background material through such techniques as time-shifts and, especially, flashbacks. It is in this direction that Laurence is moving in The Stone Angel, and to a lesser degree in The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God. Like Ford, she shows in these novels her tendency to believe that to get a vivid impression of any strong fictional character, "you could not begin at his beginning and work his life chronologically to the end. You must first get him in with a strong impression, and then work backwards and forwards over his past."¹² She does this, uniquely, with Hagar Shipley. Although the reader follows Hagar's development from a child of six to

a woman of ninety, the narrative proceeds on two levels, and the one in which the reader feels most actively the participant covers only a few weeks, and of these only a few days are treated with great detail. On the second narrative level, however, Hagar relives--through flashbacks--scenes from the past ninety years of her life. Thus, Laurence has the advantage of being able to move from high point to high point--as the short-story format of A Bird in the House enables her to do--on the second narrative level, where the problem of selection and compression is more acute, without the dead wood of sketchy bridges or awkward time gaps involved.¹³ This is possible, first, because the story is told through Hagar's memory, which is already a selective agent, and which makes an apparent lack of continuity acceptable to the reader; and second, because the intervals in the present provide a sufficient break in the continuity, so that the reader neither notices time gaps on the second narrative level nor expects a deliberate resumption of the story where it had left off. And the same, of course, is true for the narrative in the present: interludes of the past make a smooth flow of present time unnecessary, although Laurence manages to make Hagar's narrative on the first level seem a continuous and unselected chronology. Thus the two levels, one carrying her in a flight from Silverthreads, and the other presenting the "incommunicable years," move along in parallel

progression, fusing at last in the memorable scene at the fish-cannery.

The general effectiveness of Laurence's flashback technique in The Stone Angel can hardly be argued; although she admits that in the novel "the flashback method is, I think, a little overworked,"¹⁴ and the process of memory is inaccurately represented,¹⁵ the method in general is successful. One reviewer pays her technique the left-handed compliment of describing it as "a virtuoso performance" where "the magic is in the telling of the story, and the events and the people are but instruments on which the music is played: the skill of the player is everything."¹⁶ Likewise, Godfrey, although he says "theoretically I stand against the flashback technique which Laurence uses," admits that "here there seems some justification for it, in terms of the story itself; for although a good deal of space is wasted . . . , the technique is woven into the present action of the story, made parallel to the old workings of Hagar's mind; and when Marvin's wife Doris shouts at Hagar for wool-gathering, it is we who are left with another string of the yarn in our slightly shamed hands."¹⁷

Although The Stone Angel is Laurence's most interesting use of the flashback, she also uses it in The Fire-Dwellers, and to a lesser extent in A Jest of God. It is worthwhile here to consider Daiches' distinction between two kinds of montage in fiction: one method is that in which the subject

remains fixed in space and his consciousness moves in time, the result being a time-montage or superimposition of images from one time on those of another; the other method is that in which time remains fixed and the spatial dimension changes, resulting in space-montage.¹⁸ In The Stone Angel, Hagar's flashbacks involve both a time and a space montage. She recalls both a different time and a different place, and the reader frequently jumps both from present time to past time and back again, and from Vancouver to Manawaka and back. While such a combination of space and time montage is also the most frequently used in The Fire-Dwellers, such as for the Manawaka flashbacks, Laurence is effective here also in using time-montage alone, creating a vivid contrast of Stacey at the present with the Stacey of the recent past. Perhaps the best example of this¹⁹ occurs when Stacey sees Katie, "simple and intricate as grass," dancing in the TV room, and she suddenly sees herself dancing there only a few hours before: "Stacey MacAindra, thirty-nine, hips ass and face heavier than once, shamrock velvet pants, petunia-purple blouse, cheap gilt sandals high-heeled, prancing squirming jiggling" (FD, 137). And this harsh vision of herself is superimposed not only on that of her young daughter, but on the time-space flashback of herself two pages earlier, as Stacey Cameron in Manawaka, "spinning like light, whirling laughter across a polished floor" (FD, 135). Thompson likely has The Fire-Dwellers' skillful flashbacks in

mind when he says in a review of the book that "Laurence's most discernible virtue is her artistic ability to write in whole complexes of detail-perception-memory-possibility-feeling."²⁰

The effectiveness of the flashbacks in The Fire-Dwellers may be due in part, as well, to the mechanics of the novel, especially the typographical controls. Although there seems to be no reason for the abandoning of quotation marks, and there is occasional and pointless confusion between the third-person narration and the dialogue, Laurence does try to differentiate thought from action--by preceding Stacey's thought by a dash; by indenting the third-person flashbacks about a quarter of the page; by italicizing Stacey's daydreams, nightmares, speculations on the future, and science-fiction plots; and by using capitals for the radio and television intrusions. While such devices may seem obviously just that--devices--they do serve as necessary visual cues to help the reader identify passages as something that happens either internally or externally. The italicized portions of the novel are especially interesting technically, and suggest a comparison with The Sound and the Fury, where the use of italics indicates not only interior monologue but also a shift in time.²¹ The other Laurence novels also make use of italics, but never as frequently or in such sustained passages as The Fire-Dwellers. A Jest of God uses them for snatches of remembered conversations,

stray lines of poetry, or to indicate things Rachel would like to say or have said but can't or didn't; her italicized "Listen, Nick" that recurs throughout the novel is an interesting parallel to the poignant "Bram, listen," also in italics, in The Stone Angel, suggesting that Hagar, like Rachel, could never say the words, and the unsaid phrase taunts them both for their "lost men." The italics here indicate something as impossible and dream-like as they do in The Fire-Dwellers.

In fact, however, these brief italicized sections in A Jest of God are practically the only use Laurence makes in this novel of the flashback technique. What Rachel does seem to share with her sister, however, is what might be more aptly called the "flash-forward," the tendency to anticipate the future (both in its horrific and more idealized aspects), to fantasize, to escape the dull dragging of her days and their "sense of an ending, as though there were nothing to look forward to" (JG, 155). Thus we find Rachel indulging in her "waking nightmare," "anticipating the worst which never happens," albeit with school-marmish preciseness: "Yet I can see myself at school, years from now, never fully awake, in a constant dozing and drowsing, sitting at my desk, my head bobbing slowly up and down, my mouth gradually falling open without my knowing it, and people seeing and whispering until finally--" (JG, 17). It is significant that as the book progresses these imaginings of Rachel's become technically

more like Stacey's: they lose their first-person focus, often their grammatical precision, their careful incorporation into Rachel's ordered thoughts, and become less deliberately integrated and more random and imagistic to the extent that they must be preceded by a dash: "--They are in a warm concealed place, a room but not a room, a room nowhere, very apart, locked away, no one able to knock and enter, nothing around, only this bed" (JG, 115). It is easy to parallel this movement of Rachel's fantasies toward less rigidity and more spontaneity with her personal movement toward independence. Compared, however, to the importance and technical proficiency of the flashback in The Stone Angel and The Fire-Dwellers, A Jest of God uses the device both infrequently and without that enlightening vividness that would make it indispensable to the novel.

2. Tenses

Up to now, we have been concerned primarily with the effects of the Erzählzeit-Erzählzeit distinctions, and with the bridging of the gap between them through the process of selection and the use of the flashback, notably in The Stone Angel and The Fire-Dwellers. Related to all of this is the actual tense in which the novels are written. This presents another important way of seeing time in the novel--namely, through the use of the present-past axis, of the fictional time line.

According to Mendilow, even a novel narrated in the past tense is transposed by the reader into a fictive present,²² into an imaginative present of his own. This has interesting implications for Laurence's novels. Of the four, only one, A Bird in the House, is written entirely in the past tense; the others have their fictional present in the present tense, and the reader has no need to "transpose" the past tense of what he reads into his imaginative present. In addition to the advantage of this one-to-one correspondence between the tenses of the reader and the novel, Laurence's use of the present tense also generally helps to give a greater sense of vividness and immediacy-- "one would like to convey a feeling of flesh-and-blood immediacy," she says²³--and also to facilitate reader identification and interest in a character. This is why the flashbacks in The Fire-Dwellers so frequently employ images and verbals. While the verbs in the past tense, when used, are necessary to keep the event clear in the reader's mind as part of the fictional past, the avoidance of such verbs in favor of present participles ("flashing," "gawking," "swimming," "she not thinking of it like that then") retains the vividness and sense of presentness of the incident.

The problem arises, of course, as to just where the boundary between the fictional past and the fictional present is to be drawn. For The Fire-Dwellers, for example, does the fictional time begin with Stacey waking up at the beginning

of the novel or could it really begin with her childhood in Manawaka? Mendilow suggests that the boundary is usually established at one point in the story, serving as a point of reference from which the fictional present may be considered as beginning and before which any material presented is felt as past relative to that present. Everything that antedates that point, Mendilow explains,

as for instance exposition, is felt as a fictive past, while all that succeeds it, as for instance those premonitions and anticipatory hints that novelists find so useful . . . are felt as future. Verbally, all may be equally past; psychologically, once the point of reference has been established, each event presented in its time-order constitutes a point in the past series considered as a now, and whatever is out of sequence in relation to that series of points is considered as relatively past or future.²⁴

Such a schema, it might be noted, allows for an easier organization of fictional time than does the Erzählzeit concept, which is involved in one time plane only (the fictional present) and makes no allowances for movements into the past or future through the characters' thoughts or through flashbacks. According to Mendilow, then, the point of reference for a novel like The Fire-Dwellers would obviously come with the first sentences of the book ("this morning," in contrast to all other mornings of her life) and Stacey's flashbacks would be readily assigned, on the reader's time line, to the fictional past.

For The Stone Angel, however, the distinction cannot be so easily made, and the same difficulties involved in calculating its Erzählzeit arise in distinguishing its

fictional present from the fictional past. The reader's present in this case corresponds to the part of the story told in the present tense, and consequently he is always aware that all that happens on the second narrative level is "past" and that his real orientation point of the "now" begins with Hagar in the bedroom thinking of Marvin and Doris. However, the sequences in the past tense frequently have such a sense of immediateness that it is almost possible to consider them as another, equally important, fictional present. Mendilow suggests that this does, in fact, happen in many novels using the time-shift, where the locus often changes, and "each episode is treated as a fictional present . . . without reference to the temporal position it occupies when related to any other episode."²⁵ That Laurence can accomplish this in a novel using two distinct tenses is most interesting; she heightens reader identification with the early Hagar while at the same time keeping the reader's time line clear. Where Roth, for example, in Portnoy's Complaint, has his character "remember" in the present tense ("I am eight"),²⁶ the possible sense of immediacy that results is sacrificed to a sense of contrivance, and the technique, had it been sustained, would have only resulted in needless confusion of the reader's time line. Laurence achieves the same kind of immediateness as Roth, without the sense of verbal manipulation, by using the past tense. She also avoids a similar disruption of the reader's

progression in which Grove indulges in Settlers of the Marsh, when he suddenly changes from his past tense--which the reader is following as his own fictional present--to the present tense. Thus during one of Niels' earlier meetings with Ellen, the narrative suddenly switches to the present:

Again the girl stopped, breathless, flushed, but laughing. "Oh Niels!" she sang out, exuberantly, exultantly. In an instant he was by her side, reaching out for her hand, intensely serious of a sudden. "No," she begs. "Not now. Let's be happy!" But she leaves him her hand.²⁷

For four pages the narrative continues in the present, then relapses back into the past. The obvious advantage of such a technique, of course, is that it increases the intensity of the interactions in the present tense and ostensibly makes them more real; the flaw of such reasoning, however, lies in that the reader's perceptions are suddenly jarred into another time sequence from the one followed previously. In effect, what happens is that the reader is momentarily thrust forward from his reading "now" into an advanced tense that must appear to him as future. For the last scene, this might be an effective device, but its use within the narrative can appear contrived.

The Stone Angel, however, neither jars the reader's time line nor allows the reader to read too complacently two separate stories at once. On the second narrative level, Hagar frequently jumps ahead into the future, often to the time of the first narrative level: "I never knew the truth

of it until years later, years too late" (SA, 20). The reader feels as little violation of the fictional present in such a procedure as he does when Hagar suddenly shifts backward in time from the first narrative level. Nor is the present tense used merely, as Godfrey points out, as "a chute into the past;"²⁸ the present, or first narrative level, has a particular vividness of its own and Hagar's flight to the deserted old cannery is perhaps the best part of the novel. There, by the sea, there is an exceptionally fine convergence and intersection of the two narrative levels. Thomas says of it: "her climaxing, temporary defeat-and-release in irrationality, when she does confuse past and present and speaks the healing, forgiving words to her companion in flight, whom she mistakes for her dead son, John, is quite simply, unbearably moving."²⁹

Compared to the remarkable achievement of The Stone Angel, the use of the present-past axis in the other three novels is less impressive. A Bird in the House, however, is interesting because it attempts thematically the same thing as The Stone Angel, but departs from that novel's--and the others'--use of the present tense, and is written from the perspective of the older woman Vanessa remembering her childhood. Such a retrospective, apparently autobiographical novel creates, as Mendilow suggests, a "temporal distance between the fictional time--that of the events as they happened--and the narrator's actual time--his time of recording

those events."³⁰ The reader, then, finds it difficult to perceive of the action as taking place, to sink his own actual present into a fictional present. And whereas it is easy to accept Hagar's occasional jumps ahead, out of chronological sequence, in her second narrative level because the other end of the time line has already been clearly established, it is difficult to accept the same kind of projections into the future with Vanessa. For example, almost each story carries endings like, "many years later, when Manawaka was far away from me, in miles and in time . . . ;" "during the Second World War, when I was seventeen . . . ;" "when I was eighteen, I left Manawaka and went away to college" (BH, 87, 112, 125). After such movements ahead at the end of each story, it is frustrating to readjust one's fictional present back again at the start of the next story. This overlapping of time may be attributable to the fact that the stories were originally published separately in a variety of magazines, where their cumulative effect did not have to be considered. In the compilation, however, as Godfrey says of The Stone Angel, there is "something . . . which kept disbelief hovering around like an uncomfortable tsetse fly."³¹

The Fire-Dwellers returns to Laurence's use of the present tense as its dominant one. However, although the novel makes interesting use of all three time levels and includes twists into the past and future that are more sharp

and vivid than those used in The Stone Angel, the novel lacks the polish and integration of these levels that is evident in The Stone Angel. The reader, who must obligingly follow Stacey through her daily routine, may welcome her imagistic excursions into her past, but, as soon as he learns their technique, he begins to weary both of them and of the accompanying machinery. And there is no promised revelation, as there is in The Stone Angel, to sustain reader interest.

A Jest of God has obvious parallels with the time locus of The Fire-Dwellers; also in the present tense, with approximately the same Erzählzeit of two or three months, it moves Rachel through the monotony of her days, through her brief affair, and through a major crisis in her life. What the novel lacks, aside from third-person objectivity, are the vivid flashbacks of The Fire-Dwellers, and the present weighs on Rachel even more heavily than it does on Stacey. General critical response to this constant use of the present tense in A Jest of God has been unfavorable,³² but although its success is questionable, what Laurence accomplishes, or attempts to, by using the present tense must be commended. Like the psychological novelists who take the reader into the minds of the characters, Laurence tries, by using the present tense, to tell the reader not what has happened, but what is happening. This concern with conveying an intense sense of presentness, of simultaneity, while it does not go so far as to abandon what Edel calls horizontal time

in favor of vertical time, does abandon the "once upon a time" element which most novelists use. As Edel explains, "we are no longer in time past It is nearly always here and now in subjective fiction. The reader reads the thoughts and the senses at whatever moment they are thought or sensed. This gives the stream of consciousness novel a sense of immediacy."³³ A Jest of God is not, of course, a stream-of-consciousness novel in the sense that Joyce's novels are, but by using the present tense so unremittingly, Laurence does succeed in evoking the sense of immediacy, the feeling of the "here and now." She would likely agree with Eliot's concept of time as a merging of time past and time future into time present:

Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present.³⁴

Yet there is throughout the novel a sense of the present as oppressive, as a continuum that repeats itself in time past and time future: "This is our conversation. This is the way we talk, the way we go on" (JG, 79). This is strikingly similar to Stacey's comment: "--We go on this way and the needle jabs become razor strokes and the razors become hunting knives and the knives become swords and how do we stop?" (FD, 162) Elsewhere she observes how the "abrasions just go on accumulating. What a lot of heavy invisible garbage we live with" (FD, 121). The Stone Angel

also has this sense, although it is expressed in the past tense and retrospectively, of a corrosive present: "Twenty-four years, in all, were scoured away like sandbanks under the spate of our wrangle and bicker" (SA, 116). Even A Bird in the House has something of this sense of a continuing sameness, although the idea of repetitive actions here carries little of the oppressiveness that is so prevalent in the other novels: "'I see no need to blaspheme, Ewen,' Grandmother Macleod would say quietly, and then my father would say he was sorry, and I would leave" (BH, 44).

It is significant, however, that despite the frequently-evoked feeling of a stifling present, the novels all end with a strong thrust into the future (paralleled, perhaps, by the movement to the city discussed in Chapter I). In The Stone Angel, as New points out, the last words of the novel, "And then--" may mark the beginning, not the end, of a time sequence. By leaving the sentence unfinished, Laurence "closes the book in ambivalence; it is possible that time stops, but possible also that it goes on, and is merely measured in a different way."³⁵ Or the ending in mid-sentence (like Finnegan's Wake) may suggest a cyclical concept of time, where the beginning and end of the rivers of life form a unity: "In my beginning is my end . . . ; in my end is my beginning."³⁶ Hagar, indeed, speaks of her death in terms of birth; remembering John's birth, and his difficulty with breathing, she wonders if "perhaps the

same occurs elsewhere, an element so unknown you'd never suspect it at all, until--" (SA, 307). Similarly, A Bird in the House ends with a movement into the future, with Vanessa looking "only for a moment" at the Brick House, with which the novel opened, before she "drove away." The Fire-Dwellers sees Stacey reach some significant conclusions and acceptances about herself, and when the last sentence asks about "the city receding," "will it return tomorrow?" the implied answer is "yes, and Stacey will go on coping with it." A Jest of God, however, has the most important movement into the future. Almost all the verbs on the last two pages are in some future tense, suggesting an important change from the Rachel who earlier felt "as though there were nothing to look forward to" (JG, 155). Rachel has no illusions about herself; she admits "I do not know how many bones need be broken before I can walk" (JG, 201), but she is taking the risk, leaving behind, hopefully, the oppressive present and the oppressive past of Manawaka.

Laurence's heroines, then, may share something with Lily Briscoe, who ends To the Lighthouse: "With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought, laying down her brush in extreme fatigue, I have had my vision."³⁷ Laurence's women may not have had Lily's intense vision, but they have drawn a significant line. Yet there is a definite sense in which the novels

are not "finished," not "done," as Lily's painting is. Only Hagar may be thought of as "laying down her brush in extreme fatigue," and even this is debatable. Rather, there is a sense in which Laurence's novels, especially The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God, follow Gide's theory: "I consider . . . that life never presents us with anything which may not be looked upon as a fresh starting point, no less than as a termination. 'Might be continued'--these are the words with which I should like to finish my Coiners."³⁸ Even The Stone Angel might end with these words--indeed they are what the dash implies; only A Bird in the House would lose its carefully built sense of completeness if one appended "might be continued."

3. Subjective Time as Present

In addition to the distinctions between Erzählzeit and Erzähltezeit, and those that arise from a consideration of the fictional time line and the use of tenses, there is another significant way of seeing time in the novel, one that is particularly useful in the discussion of Laurence's novels. This is the distinction between objective, conceptual, or linear time, and subjective, perceptual, or psychological time.³⁹

The distinction, of course, is not a new one; it is, indeed, based on common, everyday experiences with time, and involves that interesting phenomenon whereby time apparently

lasts a much longer or shorter period for the individual than the clock would lead him to believe. That is, time in the mind of the person experiencing that time is "out of joint" with external calculations of that same duration of time. Thus Hans Castorp can say in The Magic Mountain that a minute, objectively measured, "takes such a varied length of time--to our senses!" He elaborates that "to be susceptible of being measured, time must flow evenly, but who ever said it did that? As far as our consciousness is concerned it doesn't, we only assume that it does, for the sake of convenience; and our units of measurement are purely arbitrary, sheer conventions."⁴⁰ Virginia Woolf makes the same observation: "An hour, once it lodges in the queer element of the human spirit, may be stretched to fifty or a hundred times its clock length; on the other hand, an hour may be accurately represented by the timepiece of the mind by one second."⁴¹ And Proust notes in Remembrance of Things Past that "as each hour struck, it would seem to me that a few seconds only had passed since the hour before; . . . something which had taken place had not taken place for me."⁴² It is apparent, then, that the novelist must be concerned not only with objective, external passage and measurement of time, but with the more important "timepiece of the mind," which calculates time, not according to any mechanical and arbitrarily-evolved scales like hours and minutes, but according to individual values. And the development of the

novel must to a large degree follow, not the objective clock time, but the internal time-clocks by which the characters operate.

What the internal time-clock does, of course, is contract or expand a certain time-period many times its objective, and personally invalid, length. That an author would concentrate on developing those scenes of long mind-time duration and compress those that pass quickly in the character's consciousness is thus quite understandable, especially if the novel covers a relatively long period of linear time, or Erzählzeit. Such "highs" as Hagar's overhearing John and Arlene downstairs, as Rachel's experience in the Tabernacle, as Stacey's encounter with Luke, or as Vanessa's camping out with Chris, are really concentrations on the subjective time in these characters' minds--time as they experienced it. Similarly, the time periods that are contracted--for example, the two years Hagar spent at the academy, which are barely mentioned--would be, for the experiencing person, time periods that are relatively insignificant, and hence also out of proportion with the objective duration of the periods.

The subjective apprehension of present time by Laurence's characters is apparent in their own statements. Hagar continually judges time through her own eyes. When she is on the bus "the ride is interminable" (SA, 146); when she is in the hospital "the hours are long" (SA, 262);

when she is on the way to see John in the hospital, "the few miles into Manawaka seemed thousands" (SA, 239). As she waits with John, the objective passage of clock time seems meaningless: "And then--was it hours or minutes after I arrived?--he opened his eyes" (SA, 241). Likewise, years contract or expand according to her perception of them, so that, remembering her youth, she can say at one point that "it doesn't seem so very long ago" (SA, 22) and elsewhere that "they seemed so remote, those days" (SA, 203). Even when some objective period of time is recorded as having passed, it is evaluated through Hagar's eyes: of her seventeen-year period of living with Marvin she says "it weighs like centuries" (SA, 37); of the twenty-four years with Bram she says: "Twenty-four years, in all, were scoured away like sandbanks under the spate of our wrangle and bicker" (SA, 116). Even the number of years she herself has accumulated is inconsistent with her internal calendar: "I am ninety, and this figure seems somehow arbitrary and impossible" (SA, 38). Hagar is aware, then, of the two time measurements that operate in life--the one counting up, on what Faulkner calls an "arbitrary dial,"⁴³ the moments as they tick away with mathematical precision to that last moment, and the other denying the validity of this external calculation of time.

Vanessa is likewise aware of the two time clocks; she speaks of the "leaden weeks" that pass, of time moving

for Chris "slowly, all through the days and nights" (BH, 154), and of how Chris left her mind with "a quickness due to other things that happened" (BH, 140). Elsewhere she observes that "after the war seemed a time too distant and indefinite to contemplate" (BH, 198). For Stacey, too, clock time frequently is inaccurate, cutting off unequal lengths of inner time. It might be possible also to see the frequent intrusions of phrases from radio and TV into Stacey's consciousness as a disruption of her psychological time. Everything moves too fast; it is all "too much too much too much" (FD, 95), and the speeded-up world that accosts her in headlines, commercials and news items continually reminds her that her internal clock is moving too slowly. She is tyrannized by the routine demands that each hour brings, and when she escapes with Luke it is into subjective time, away from the regulation of the "arbitrary dial." When she returns to the world of clock time, it is to find it has moved much more quickly than have the hands of her inner clock, and she has "lost" several hours. Her return to her housewife-mother world is expressed in terms of re-orientation to linear time, and when she does not say all she wants to Luke because "it would take too much time" (FD, 204), it is this linear time to which she refers. "The drive home is endless. Stacey hazards quick glances at her watch and each time finds that it is later than she imagined it could possibly be" (FD, 205). It is indeed

"later" than she "imagined" because two time concepts are involved; it is clock time that determines her lateness, but psychological time that works in the world of her imagination. When she drives out to see Luke again, the conflict of times recurs: "the drive out to Luke's is interminable tonight. . . . And I've got to be home by eleven at the latest" (FD, 224). And when she rushes home, the accusing refrain of "ladybird, ladybird" echoes both from her clock-dominated world and from her subjective world of time with Luke. If Stacey is "wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born,"⁴⁴ they are worlds of time, one external and one internal.

Rachel, like Stacey, moves in a world under the dictatorship of the clock, which has little patience with her restructuring of time according to her imagination. Yet she is able frequently to disregard the rigid demands of external time, to experience time subjectively. "An hour seems to have passed since he spoke, but it's only a second" (JG, 8). "Only an instant has elapsed, I guess" (JG, 133). "The night feels like a gigantic ferris wheel turning in blackness, very slowly, turning once for each hour, turning interminably slow" (JG, 18). And, like Stacey, she loses track of linear time when she is out with Nick. Returning to the house, she wonders, "is Mother in bed yet? . . . How long a time has it been?" (JG, 72-3) Later, when she considers suicide, clock time again becomes an unreliable

measure of what happens. She cannot remember emptying the pills on the lawn because "time must have stopped for a time" (JG, 170). External time, that is, had "stopped" while Rachel's psychological time took over. Generally, however, since what the reader is presented with are Rachel's perceptions of time, the periods of time that are contracted or protracted in the novel are based on the significance those periods had for Rachel, so that scenes treated in detail are usually those with long mind-time duration. The same is true for the other three novels.

It must be remembered, of course, that although the dramatic high spots in the novels appear to be ones that Hagar or Rachel or Stacey or Vanessa have themselves perceived as of long mind-time duration, it is the novelist behind them who is the actual creator of such highs and lows. Edel says of Joyce that "his selection was addressed to the creating of an illusion that there had been no selection."⁴⁵ Laurence creates a similar illusion--not, however that there is no selection, but that the selection is done by the characters themselves, not the controlling novelist. It is an important distinction, and one that may suggest a further distinction, that between Laurence's novels and the stream-of-consciousness school.

Laurence is not a stream-of-consciousness novelist, in the sense that Joyce or Woolf are, although she shares their concern for communicating subjective reality, for

emphasizing a first-person present-tense viewpoint. Yet it is obvious that Laurence does not entirely make use of what Dudek calls "the discovery of Marcel Proust," which urges that "one must dwell on every moment of experience, on the subjective psychological density of it, until the reality of the entire present, which includes within it all the past, and perhaps also some ultimate eternal essence of things, is communicated."⁴⁷ Laurence may tend to reveal the "subjective psychological density" of life, but she does not dwell on "every moment of experience." Rather, she selects dramatic high spots, creating the illusion that these are the selections made by her characters. She does not, that is, subscribe to Virginia Woolf's theory of writing: "Let us record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness."⁴⁸ For Laurence's characters, life presents peaks and plateaus, moments of time of differing intensities. Even in A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers, Laurence does not record each falling atom, and when she uses subjective time it is to show how this mind-time creates, not reduces, high and low points out of the flow of linear time.

Laurence, however, does use elements of the stream-of-consciousness technique, especially in A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers, whose Erzählzeiten are relatively short,

and in which what happens in the characters' minds is more important than what happens, or has happened, outside it. And there is also a sense in which these two novels accomplish a merging of past and present to a much greater extent than do either The Stone Angel or A Bird in the House. Laurence does not achieve in this area what Mendilow says the stream-of-consciousness novelists do, but she is moving in that direction: "there is [for most of the stream-of-consciousness school] no past as such at all, only a growing present, for no part of the past has an independent identity; the whole grows and alters as the present shifts."⁴⁹

It might help at this point to consider Humphrey's discussion of stream-of-consciousness methods, and to relate A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers to his comments. Humphrey speaks of three main stream-of-consciousness techniques: interior monologue (direct and indirect), omniscient description, and soliloquy. Of these, Laurence is closest to the third, soliloquy, which, Humphrey says, represents "the psychic content and processes of a character directly from character to reader without the presence of an author, but with an audience tacitly assumed."⁵⁰ This "assumption of a formal and immediate audience" characterizes both A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers and distinguishes both novels from the interior monologue method. They have, that is, a much greater degree of coherence, of conscious thought, than do interior monologue novels, which deal with various

levels of consciousness and which represent "the content of consciousness in its inchoate stage before it is formulated for deliberate speech."⁵² When the reader follows the thoughts of Rachel or Stacey, he is aware that the characters are indeed speaking to someone, that the thought flow is not completely candid and apparently unselected. It is only necessary to compare a random sample of Rachel's thoughts with Joyce's presentation of Molly Bloom's to see the difference:

As I walk on, I don't seem to be seeing the street. I can smell the dust that is blown along the sidewalk by the incessant summer wind. I can hear the store awnings fluttering and flapping like the exhausted wings of pelicans. And I can feel, still, the innuendo in Willard's voice. (JG, 82)

no thats no way for him has he no manners nor no refinement nor no nothing in his nature slapping us behind like that on my bottom because I didn't call him Hugh the ignoramus that doesnt know poetry from a cabbage thats what you get for not keeping them in their proper place pulling off his shoes and trousers there on the chair⁵³

Obviously with Laurence the reader is not made to feel, as he is with Joyce, that he is wandering in an uncharted wilderness. Laurence shows a much greater similarity to the soliloquy method used by Faulkner in As I Lay Dying, where, although "there remains an arrangement of thought units as they would originate in the character's consciousness,"⁵⁴ the thoughts of the speakers are presented in a much more ordered and coherent manner.

In The Fire-Dwellers, too, the emphasis is on the soliloquy method, but the sudden flashbacks, using what

Mendilow calls "the marginal vision and the day-dreaming mind,"⁵⁵ suggest a closer link with the interior monologue. To a slight extent, The Fire-Dwellers also uses Humphrey's "omniscient description," in which the reader remains in the mind of the character but the method is entirely third-person and descriptive; however, although The Fire-Dwellers does use sections of third-person narration, and these from Stacey's point of view, they are generally meant only to counterpoint the purely subjective excursions into Stacey's mind and to present a more objective description of action. Thus, although the third-person parts of the novel can contain such subjective reactions as "Stacey all at once recognizes the parallel lines which if they go on being parallel cannot ever meet" (FD, 197), most of these sections simply present such objective descriptions as "Stacey makes as if to step forward. Buckle stops her, holding her shoulders" (FD, 157).

It is apparent, then, that although Laurence uses stream-of-consciousness techniques in A Jest of God and The Fire-Dwellers, she is far from the commitment to the method such authors as Joyce have made, and in A Bird in the House she abandons the method completely. What, however, of The Stone Angel? To understand how Laurence uses the stream-of-consciousness method in this novel, it is necessary to examine another important aspect of subjective time: memory.

4. Subjective Time as Memory

The Stone Angel is, to a large extent, based on the memory process and consequently its misuse of memory is the most serious artistic flaw of the novel. Consider what Meyerhoff says of the memory process: "the causal connections (or associations) between events within memory do not constitute an objective, uniform, consecutive order of 'earlier' or 'later' as they do for events in nature."⁵⁶ Mendilow speaks of how, in following a character's mental processes, "flashes of the past jerk in and out of his present consciousness, telescoping, coalescing, disintegrating, breaking out of sequence, starting off chains of unpredictable and sometimes untraceable associations."⁵⁷ Memory, then, the capricious seamstress who, as Woolf says, "runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither,"⁵⁸ does not follow a temporal "logical" sequence, as common sense accustoms us to expect; rather memory must be seen as a form of disorder, as a violation of objective, serial order.⁵⁹ The Stone Angel, obviously, does not use this principle of disorder and distortion of events in memory, a principle basic to the stream-of-consciousness writers. In fact, Hagar's recollections on the second narrative level could be set apart from the present-tense sections of the novel and become a most coherent and chronologically-developed story on its own. The memory sections are in

strict sequence, and although Hagar speaks of "the junkyard of my memory," it is a junkyard in which all the discarded memories are organized in a uniform and linear order, from Hagar remembering herself at age six to her memory of her last trip to the Manawaka cemetery with Marvin and Doris. Surely this is a highly artificial and contrived use of memory, which follows no sequence of time, especially over interruptions and passage of time in the present. That details or events in the present should almost always cause Hagar's reminiscences seems to indicate that Hagar had no preconceived plan to tell her story chronologically; hence that the reminiscences should develop chronologically suggests a high degree of manipulation by the author. Laurence herself admits that she is "not at all sure that flashbacks ought to be in chronological order, as I placed them in order to make it easier for the reader to follow Hagar's life."⁶⁰

It is unlikely, then, that Thomas is correct when she says that "any questions about a forced tidiness of form are hushed as Hagar takes shape and authority; this is the way she would remember, forcing order on her own mind as she had tried always to force her own order on all those around her."⁶¹ What Thomas does not account for here is the fact that Laurence also uses associative memory. If Hagar could have forced "order on her own mind," her memories could not have been triggered continually by some sight, sound or thought in the present, for these "trigger mechanisms,"

as Edel calls them, do not evoke memories in a neat chronological progression, but shuffle them out of sequence; it is the process of free association, a process that Laurence might have used very successfully had she not attempted to combine it with a chronological approach. Like Proust's Marcel, Hagar is led into the past by a sensory guide in the present:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, . . . the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.⁶²

Thus, as the crumb of madeleine with tea and the phrase from Vinteuil's sonata evoke memories for Marcel, so are the memories of past activities for Hagar evoked by similar activities or objects in the present. As she drinks her tea (which, unlike Marcel's, "tastes like hemlock"), the sense of "being alone in a strange place, the nurse's unseeing stare, the receding heat of the day--all bring to mind the time I was first in a hospital, when Marvin was born" (SA, 99). The waiting in the doctor's office reminds her of the "many years I waited at the Shipley place" (SA, 112); her moving to the seashore reminds her of the other move she made, away from Manawaka; the children playing house make her remember "some other children, once, playing at house, but in a somewhat different manner" (SA, 192). Although Robertson, who prefers "to have the jumps, when

they came, to be abrupt, disconnected," may be right when he accuses the transitions between the narrative levels of lacking "deftness," and of making the reader "too much aware of them when they do occur,"⁶³ these trigger mechanisms do operate according to the principles of associative memory.

Laurence, however, does not rely exclusively on the long excursions into Hagar's memory on the second narrative level to reveal Hagar's past, and it is when she incorporates brief flashes of memory into the first narrative level that the process seems most natural, most true to the principles of associative memory, where memories crop up out of sequence and their causal relationship is not one determined by their occurrence in chronological time. Thus the color of her lilac dress reminds Hagar of "the lilacs that used to grow beside the gray front porch of the Shipley place" (SA, 29), and the brief paragraph-long description is an especially arresting one, precisely because it does not fit into the order of the second narrative level, which has left the reader with Hagar Currie, not Hagar Shipley. Similarly effective is the mention a few pages later of Bram, whom the reader has not yet met, but whose name consequently is implanted in the reader's mind at an early point in the book. Perhaps the best use of such anticipatory hints, however, concerns John. Hagar first mentions his name in the first chapter, and Laurence feels no need to explain

him immediately to the reader; his name slides easily into Hagar's consciousness, and she makes no further explanation than this: "John's eyes were gray, and even near the last they looked the same to me as the boy's, still that hidden eagerness as though he half believed, against all reason and knowledge, that something splendid would suddenly occur" (SA, 38-9). The reader receives other hints about John, but his birth, in the second narrative level, does not occur until eighty pages later, and the cause of his death remains tantalizingly mysterious until very late in the novel. Hagar tells the woman in the nursing home that she had two sons, one of whom "was killed--in the last war" (SA, 104); but although she admits to the reader that this is not true, she does not elaborate, and the reader must wait until her scene with Lees before he finally understands what is true, and what Hagar really means when she tells Lees, "I had a son, and lost him" (SA, 234). The impact of her revelation is considerably heightened by the anticipations.

Excellent as the brief and purely associational jumps into the past are, however, in The Stone Angel Laurence has committed herself to the use of a sustained second narrative level. Perhaps some of the violations it demands of the memory process are inevitable, but it is unfortunate that Laurence realized only in retrospect that the flashbacks might have been more effective if not in

chronological order. A Jest of God, which is free from the rigorous demands of two distinct narrative levels, handles the memory process much more naturally, although there is a sense of manipulation of Rachel's recollections, simply to give the necessary exposition. For the most part, however, it is well-integrated with her present state of mind and thoughts, and although her memories are not entirely associational, they at least avoid the restricting chronology with which Hagar is faced. The most effective use of memory in A Jest of God, however, concerns those recurring memories, usually very brief, that involve some painful experience. "Such moments," Rachel says, remembering the young couple on the hill, "are the ones that live forever;" they refuse to die: "I wish I could forget that day, and those kids, but I can't" (JG, 80). Frequently, the memories are ones of events in which the reader participated earlier in the fictional present; it is a technique Laurence uses excellently in the flashbacks in The Fire-Dwellers. For Rachel, perhaps the most painful of such memories is the Tabernacle scene: "I remember everything, every detail, and will never be able to forget, however hard I try. It will come back again and again, and I will have to endure it, over and over" (JG, 37). She recalls it as she talks to her mother, and to Calla, and she is "back there in that indefensible moment, trapped in my own alien voice, and the eyes all around have swollen to giants' eyes. How will I

ever be able to forget?" (JG, 48) The memory of her making love with Nick is likewise characterized by a mocking painfulness, by a sense of the absurd: "I can see myself now, the frenetic haste, like a person in some early film, everything speeded-up comically" (JG, 95). The memory is very similar to Stacey's mocking flashback of her hurried loving of Luke: "Stacey, touching him too urgently--now, now, no time to waste, I haven't got all day. Stacey lacking any merciful robe" (FD, 206).

Stacey, of course, is frequently struck by such unpleasant recollections of her recent behavior. As she watches Katie dance, she relives her own dance scene, seeing herself as a grotesque; she torments herself with memories of her behavior with Thor; she cringes from Ian's shrill voice because the words recall Mac's words: "Can't you leave me alone? Can't you just leave me alone?" (FD, 215) It is interesting that Hagar remembers facing almost the same words from her son, with the same feeling that they can never be "put from mind, even now. 'Can't you shut up?' John cried. 'Can't you just shut up?'" (SA, 133) Also, Stacey's memories often have in common with Hagar's the trigger mechanisms which integrate the flashbacks into the fictional present, alive and suddenly thrust into Stacey's consciousness. Mac's bitter words, "You do, eh? You really think you do?" suddenly provoke a flashback of her father, locked in the mortuary, saying the same words to her mother

(FD, 44). The almost-automatic love-making with Mac recalls the magic of their early years together (FD, 123). Luke's mention of horoscopes creates a flashback of her job with Janus Uranus (FD, 190). The trip to the morgue inspires a memory of Cameron's Funeral Home (FD, 235). And the name of Vernon Winkler, as "the recollection filters blurredly back," gives rise to a flashback of Stacey in Manawaka watching a fight (FD, 267). Although the trigger mechanisms in Stacey's fictional present might be accused of the same obviousness that Robertson believed was a problem in The Stone Angel, they are generally handled much more deftly, and Godfrey's criticism of The Stone Angel's transitions ("a good deal of space is wasted"⁶⁴) would certainly not apply to The Fire-Dwellers. The jumps are sharp and sudden, the flashbacks themselves brief and vivid. The trigger mechanisms exist, but less intrusively than in The Stone Angel, and the movement toward a "Faulknerian disjunction of time past"⁶⁵ that is conspicuously absent in Hagar's recollections becomes evident in Stacey's.

The use of memory in A Bird in the House is, although the basis of the book, less interesting than that of the other novels. The entire novel is memory, recalled by the forty-year-old Vanessa, whom the reader meets only at the end. Like The Stone Angel, the memories are recounted chronologically,⁶⁶ and although the reader can accept this disciplining of memory into a linear order because it is recounted

deliberately and without interruption, in the past tense, by the controlled and mature Vanessa, he cannot feel the same excitement he feels at one of Stacey's--or even Hagar's--sudden flashbacks. The memories become memoirs, recapturing not the visions of childhood but the reflections of the writing adult. Even when sudden associative memories strike the young Vanessa, such as the memory of driving in the car with her grandfather, they are so elaborately prefaced that any of the vividness of the kind of flashback in The Fire-Dwellers is soon dulled:

There, in the middle, was the button which used to make the horn work. All at once I could hear that horn again, loudly, in my head, and I remembered something I didn't know I knew. I remembered riding in the MacLaughlin-Buick with my grandfather. It was a memory with nothing around it, an unplaced memory without geography or time. I must have been exceedingly young, four at the most. (BH, 178)

Granted, the memory is a significant one, especially since it had sprung suddenly from the unconscious, but Robertson's wish for "abrupt, disconnected" jumps into a memory can certainly be appreciated here. The restrained style of A Bird in the House does not, of course, allow for such brittle breaks, but the traditional approach is an unfortunate departure from the accomplishments of the earlier novels.

If, however, memory is examined according to Mendilow's concept of it, where "the event in the past at the time of its occurrence is not as it is recalled later," where "the reaction, not the action, is important," and where "something has changed--the perceiver,"⁶⁷ A Bird in the

House becomes a more interesting study of memory. That the recollected event differs from the actual event is readily apparent in both The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God, where Stacey and Rachel continually distort in memory significant events, usually painful ones; however, it is only in A Bird in the House and, to a lesser extent, The Stone Angel that the entire novel is devoted to a revaluation of the past, an examination of it from the present perspective. Meyerhoff makes a similar comment on the work of Proust: "To construct a work of art is to re-construct the world of experience and the self. And thus a concept of the self emerges, through the act of creative recall translated into a process of artistic creation, displaying characteristics of unity and continuity which could not be attributed to the self as given in immediate experience."⁶⁸ Laurence of course is no Proust, and the adult Vanessa and Hagar, recalling their pasts, are no Marcells; but their quests are similar--a search for time past in order to understand themselves in time present. It may be this search for integration of self that leads Thompson to such praise for the technique of A Bird in the House, in which he says Laurence has avoided "the usual dangers of this method" and "accomplished the virtues." "In the same period of time different things occur in the life of Vanessa. She does not recognize their significance. However, the narrator--by looking at different patterns in that same sequence of time--does."⁶⁹ Although

the novel really never gives a precise sense of the adult narrator against whom the younger Vanessa is played, there is a use of what Thompson calls the "double-perspective," in which the narrator learns "from what the child experienced and failed to understand. Vanessa sees things but Mrs. Laurence sees the significance of things."⁷⁰

What Thompson lauds here is simply the "double focus," which interested such much earlier writers as Sterne, Richardson and Defoe.⁷¹ Richardson's comments on the problems involved in using these "two characters" has a bearing on the problems Laurence faces in A Bird in the House, where the narrating author is separated by a long space of time from the narrated events: "The author has all along two characters to support, for he has to consider how his hero felt at the time of the events to be related, and how it is natural he should feel them at the time he is relating them."⁷² Further, Richardson says:

Much more lively and affecting . . . must be the style of those who write in the height of a present distress; the mind tortured by the pangs of uncertainty . . . ; than the dry, narrative unanimated style of a person relating difficulties and danger surmounted, can be . . . the relater perfectly at ease; and if himself, unmoved by his own story, not likely greatly to affect the reader.⁷³

It is easy to place the Vanessa who narrates A Bird in the House in the latter category, relating events "when curiosity is extinguished, passion cooled, and when, at any rate, the suspense which rendered them interesting is over."⁷⁴ Thomas, however, appreciates A Bird in the House for just

this distance between the character who experiences and the character who narrates "from a platform of adult awareness:"

These stories are quiet in tone and mellow in their flavour. Hagar and Rachel were characters embroiled in intensity and requiring intense response; Vanessa, the narrator, provides a calmly consistent viewpoint as she looks back at her child-self, who dealt with the circumstances of her place and life buoyantly and with growing sensitivity.⁷⁵

Even if one does not dispute the "calmly consistent viewpoint" of the narrator,⁷⁶ it is debatable whether the sacrifice of the more immediate perceptions of the experiencing Vanessa is worth the restrained and controlled style of the adult. The distance between the two characters is too great for the reader to accept Vanessa's credibility as a child, or to participate to any extent in the life which she herself looks back on with relative uninvolvedness. If A Jest of God can be accused of a lack of distance, A Bird in the House certainly can be accused of too great a distance. Compared, for example, to the reduced distance between narrator and experiencer in Mitchell's Jake and the Kid, where the perspective is close enough to the event that some of the conditions are still constant ("Jake helps Ma and me farm;" "Miss Henchbaw that teaches us kids"), but removed enough that the incident narrated can be seen in its entirety ("Take that day last fall"),⁷⁷ A Bird in the House is much less successful in communicating to the reader the immediateness of childhood. Certainly Dobbs' conclusion, that "the filter of a child's mind between us and the events . . . heightens the emotional charge,"⁷⁸ is erroneous.

There is another problem involved in working with the two characters, a problem Mendilow notes in Moll Flanders, where "two characters are superimposed one upon the other, and the impression of the one who acts is coloured and distorted by the interpretation of the one who narrates."⁷⁹ While Laurence generally avoids imposing on the young Vanessa the judgements of the narrating Vanessa, she tries too obviously to retain Vanessa's childhood perceptions while at the same time presenting an adult evaluation of a situation; thus Laurence overuses both the eavesdropping device and the listening-but-not-understanding device, both of which allow the child Vanessa to remain "only partially knowing" while the older Vanessa can use her as a medium for presenting an incident. The young Vanessa, then, frequently must say, "I could not really comprehend these things" (BH, 59); "her face became startled, and something else which I could not fathom" (BH, 68); "at the time I felt only bewilderment" (BH, 132). The strain between the Vanessa who perceives these things in her limited way and the Vanessa who remembers perceiving them becomes one of the greatest problems in the novel, and it often requires an unwilling suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader to accept both the understanding of the child and also the detailed and more objective recall of the older Vanessa. Thompson is probably right when he says Laurence is aiming at "revealing a reevaluation of a character," and that therefore

"it is the voice of the narrator which is of final importance in reading A Bird in the House."⁸⁰ If this is true, however, it becomes even more difficult to accept the credibility of the child, and progressively more easy to accept unthinkingly the judgements, or implied judgements, of the older narrator, whom the reader never actually gets to meet and evaluate for himself.

The two Hagar in The Stone Angel present much more of a challenge to the reader, for he is continually evaluating not only the younger Hagar, but also the older Hagar who remembers her; thus the narrating Hagar is of greater interest precisely because she does not, as does the older Vanessa, represent a fully self-aware and objective character. Because the reader knows and becomes involved with her life in the present tense, he is doubly willing to participate in her earlier life; and, having realized that the old Hagar is anything but infallible, he becomes more interested in seeing how she restructures and reevaluates her past life. Evidence of a change in Hagar's attitudes is easy to find, and, like Vanessa, she frequently uses the "now-then" distinction to show an increased understanding over the years, but her understanding is often--and significantly--a movement from a definite assessment to one of doubt. Seeing her father with Lottie Dreiser's mother, she "felt no pity for her nor for him. I scorned them both . . . Yet now, remembering their faces, I'd be hard put to say

which of them had been the crueler" (SA, 18-9). Elsewhere, she says of Dan that he "cultivated illness as some people cultivate rare plants. Or so I thought then" (SA, 22). And "it seemed to me then that Matt was almost apologetic, as though he felt he ought to tell me he didn't blame me for her dying, when in his heart he really did. Maybe he didn't feel that way at all--how can a person tell?" (SA, 24-5) Remembering her life with Bram, she recalls, "It was so clear to me then who was in the wrong. Now I'm no longer certain" (SA, 70-1); "I have to laugh now, although I was livid then" (SA, 83). This greater understanding of her earlier self, and her final acceptance of the necessity of needing other people--shown, for example, in the juxtaposing of her earlier refusal to "cry in front of strangers, whatever it cost me" (SA, 242) with her present discovery that with the man at the beach she is "not sorry I've talked to him, not sorry at all, and that's remarkable" (SA, 245)--is made possible in the novel by the two-character technique.

What makes the method so successful in The Stone Angel and much less so in A Bird in the House is that reader involvement in the two Hagars is much greater than in the two Vanessas. Thompson's statement about A Bird in the House, that the voice of the narrator is of greatest importance, is even more true of The Stone Angel, for as the reader learns about the young Hagar, he learns more and more about the narrating Hagar, an obviously imperfect but highly individual

character who grows and changes most, not on the second narrative level, but on the first. Compared to the dynamic Hagar, Vanessa is a static, unchanging narrator, fixed in time and attitude. And while Thompson and Thomas may be justified in their praise of Laurence's handling of the child-to-adult theme in A Bird in the House,⁸¹ it is quite possible Leviant's criticism of the book for its "predictable" characters and its "sentimentalized" style "reminiscent of the Life with Father type of melodrama,"⁸² can be attributed to its double-focus approach and its placement of the memoir-writer far in the future of the reader's fictional present. There is the further complication that the memoir-writer is restricted to the very narrow viewpoint of the first person, and since all of Laurence's novels are predominantly first person, it is a topic that will be dealt with more extensively in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST PERSON

Closely related to the use of time, especially subjective time, in Laurence's work are her choice of point of view and her use of the narrator. Just as the present tense is predominant in her novels, so is her use of the first person.¹ Only in The Fire-Dwellers does she make use of another point of view, and even here the reader follows events primarily in Stacey's mind. Laurence's commitment to first-person narration, however, while enabling her to accomplish a great deal in making her protagonists real to the reader, involves her in problems which she does not completely overcome.

Before examining these problems it might be useful to consider Hildick's rather elementary breakdown of kinds of narrative,² an analysis significant here for its inability to account for Laurence's kind of novel. Hildick discusses thirteen types of narrative, and of these the following six may be relevant to Laurence's novels: the "here and now: third-person present;" the "listen while I tell you: first-person past (as if spoken);" the "as I sit here at my desk: first-person past (as if written);" the "all dialogue;" the "dear me: in the form of a diary," and the "disorderly mind: stream of consciousness." As has been discussed in

Chapter II, Laurence is not a stream-of-consciousness novelist; yet of all the narrative categories Hildick suggests, it is nevertheless this type towards which her novels are most inclined. The Stone Angel and A Jest of God are perhaps the most difficult to classify. Whereas A Bird in the House can be readily called a "as I sit here at my desk" type, and The Fire-Dwellers would, if classification had to be made, fall into the "here and now" category, with elements of the "all dialogue" and "disorderly mind" types, the other two novels, with their emphasis on the first-person present, are not really accounted for. The second narrative level sections of The Stone Angel, of course, might be considered as one of the two first-person past types, either spoken to an imagined audience, or written; this still leaves, however, the majority of The Stone Angel, and A Jest of God, to consider.

The diary or "dear me" form is related to what Laurence attempts in these novels, but again, Hildick's categorization is inadequate, and more relevant is a consideration of a particular type of diary form: the confessional novel. Frye's definition emphasizes the "introverted, but intellectualized"³ content of the confessional, which aims at integrating experience. Axthelm offers a similar description of the confessional hero as one who is, "at some point in his life, examining his past as well as his innermost thoughts, in an effort to achieve some form of perception."⁴

He is, Axthelm says,

afflicted and unbalanced, disillusioned and groping for meaning. . . . He views his condition not with anger but with a deep internal pain; he rejects external rebellion in favor of self-laceration. His suffering originates not in the chaos of the world but in the chaos within the self, and for him the only possible order or value must be found in self-understanding. . . . Whatever the external forces upon him, he ultimately looks inward, suspending the course of external events while he probes his past and considers his existence.⁵

The similarities between the confessional hero and Laurence's protagonists are easy to see; with the exception of Vanessa, her characters are indeed, though not always unbalanced, "groping for meaning," and they examine their pasts and their "innermost thoughts" to understand themselves. However, although Stacey, Hagar, and Rachel reveal some qualities of the confessional hero, the novels cannot be simply classified as confessional any more than they can be called stream-of-consciousness.⁶ The major difference lies in the phrase, "suspending the course of external events."⁷ Certainly, the exploration of self, even the "laceration" of self, becomes more important than what happens externally, but Laurence does not stop the action as her characters reflect; rather, she makes their thoughts coincident with the action, and records both what occurs inside and outside the individual.

The point of this discussion concerning Hildick and Axthelm is not to suggest that all novels must be readily categorized, but to show that Laurence's choice and treatment

of tense and person in The Stone Angel, and especially in A Jest of God, is a most unusual one. Mendilow's casual dismissal of the method, then, might be explained by the fact that it is indeed so uncommon a combination of tense and person that he had not encountered its effective use: "A narrative in the first person and written throughout in the present tense would, if it were possible at all, appear so artificial as to make any identification impossible. It would obviously be limited to sensations and thoughts and exclude all action. It would also obtrude the act of writing itself."⁸ Laurence, then, undertakes a novel form that Mendilow asserts is impossible--although, it must be remembered, Mendilow's book was published in 1952, and much has happened to the novel since then; Beautiful Losers is only one example of a successful first-person, largely present-tense novel. Critical reaction to A Jest of God, however, tends to support Mendilow's view; there is an almost unanimous dissatisfaction with the method and the resulting characterizations. Thomas says that "Rachel's present is overpowering to her," and that "she can hardly ever see through to another Rachel, or to a wider world, and yet the reader has to constantly be made to see the whole potential person behind the neurotic facade."⁹ Duffy agrees that Rachel is an unengaging creation: "the reader sees the mess she's in, but can only mutter, 'That's your problem, baby,' without getting especially involved."¹⁰ Harlow, feeling the same

way about Rachel, says that "one yearns for the third person point of view and the omniscient author--old-fashioned techniques for an old-fashioned story."¹¹ New agrees that the first-person point of view "explains much of the difficulty."¹² The other characters in A Jest of God are criticized for being similar cardboard figures; since they are necessarily seen only through Rachel's eyes, they "skim away" from the reader. Thomas says that Laurence "needed to give us more to see in Mrs. Cameron and Nick, who, too much of the time, are almost stereotypes of selfish mother and casual seducer."¹³ Duffy likewise says that Nick is "not drawn in any depth," and that the "final flatness in the novel is the portrait of Rachel's martyr-tyrant mother."¹⁴ New is more generous, but admits that the novel "does have a few difficulties with making the male characters more than stock figures."¹⁵

Critical consensus would seem to be, then, that the method of A Jest of God is a failure, although Braddock raises a dissenting voice: "The impact of A Jest of God comes from the story being told in the first person, present tense. It is a perfect example of a difficult technique sustained."¹⁶ Perhaps the best defense of the novel, however, comes from Laurence herself. Acknowledging that critics have disapprovingly called it a very "inturned novel," she says, "I recognize the limitations of a novel told in the first person and the present tense, from one viewpoint only,

but it couldn't have been done any other way, for Rachel herself is a very inturned person."¹⁷ Although it is possible to accuse Laurence here of simply using the imitative fallacy, she does raise a viable argument to support her novel: it is, from beginning to end, purely Rachel's novel and although it is possible that a limited omniscient viewpoint could have presented her story as well, it could not have captured that total subjectivity that presents Rachel as a close relative of the confessional hero, alienated from herself and from the world, desperately trying to understand herself. To accuse A Jest of God of giving too narrow a view, or, as Mendilow accuses the autobiographical novel of doing, of creating a character who cannot present his own "unconscious reactions and prejudices convincingly,"¹⁸ is to condemn the very qualities that are commendable in A Jest of God. The point is for the reader to see things as Rachel sees them,¹⁹ to experience her from the inside, and yet to be able to see into the character herself and to understand her as she does not understand herself. The novel, certainly, is not a complete success in its combination of the most restricting tense with the most restricting viewpoint, but neither is it the hopelessly inept work some critics have charged it to be. Perhaps Braddock is one of the few who have understood what Laurence is trying to achieve: "I was conscious at the end of the book that I had not read about Rachel Cameron but experienced her."²⁰

Compared to the critical disapproval Laurence's use of first-person present received for A Jest of God, her use of it in The Stone Angel was received much more favorably, and comparison between the two novels in this respect is frequent. New believes A Jest of God is not as "consistently fine"²¹ as The Stone Angel, and Stedmond explains that this is because "first-person narration, which works well as a way of telling the ninety-year-old Hagar's story, allowing her to look back over her long life and see her experiences in some sort of perspective, brings us rather too close to Rachel, making us participate almost too actively in her self-pity."²² Harlow agrees that what worked for Laurence in The Stone Angel, "with its more leisurely pace, its sense of time and place and character," betrays her in A Jest of God. "Hagar swims strongly in the last full tide of her life. Rachel drowns as a character in the first flood of her experience."²³ What seems to have made the use of first-person present such a success in The Stone Angel is its being interspersed with first-person past. The reader can see things through Hagar's eyes in the same way that he could see through Rachel's eyes, but he has here the added advantage of seeing Hagar's own retrospective view of her past; and what is achieved, for both the reader and Hagar, is objectivity and distance. Thus the restricted viewpoint, ranging as it does over all of Hagar's life, facilitates a greater understanding of and identification

with Hagar than it could with Rachel, yet it retains that sense of "experiencing" her life.

A Bird in the House, also a first-person novel, and a fairly obvious example of Frye's "fictional autobiography, the Künstler-roman,"²⁴ has the same limitations as most novels of this type; even Thompson admits that "its focus is naturally close and logically limited" and that "we can be aware, with the narrator, only of the perspective of Vanessa."²⁵ The greatest problem in A Bird in the House, however, is not its use of the first person, but of the temporal distance between the narrator and the experiencing child.²⁶ Its first-person perspective, written, as Mendilow says, "backward from the present" as opposed to "forward from the past, as in the third-person novel,"²⁷ loses both the reader involvement a third-person novel would create and the involvement the reader feels in the lives of Hagar and Rachel, with their strong sense of presentness.

Only in The Fire-Dwellers, however, does Laurence turn to the use of the third person, yet keeping the first-person focus through Stacey's thoughts. It is an interesting combination of viewpoints: all Stacey's thoughts are presented in separate, first-person passages; all dialogue is presented purely as spoken, without any prefacing "he said, she said;" all action and flashbacks are presented in the third person, yet from the limited omniscient viewpoint of Stacey.²⁸ This use of the third person in

the novel may be its most significant achievement. Mendilow especially recommends such a restricted, third-person viewpoint: "This method is by way of a compromise between the omniscient and the autobiographical methods; the artificial convention of the omniscient author is limited to one person only in the novel; on the other hand, the inflexibility and the various disadvantages attendant on the first-person novel are avoided."²⁹ Laurence's combination of this third-person approach with a first-person viewpoint in the stream-of-consciousness vein is particularly effective, for it allows the reader to see Stacey both objectively and subjectively, to follow the action from an external vantage point and also zoom in on Stacey's thoughts. The continual jumps from first-person perspective to sudden, usually terse, third-person narration has the added effect of suggesting a kind of schizophrenic impersonalization of self, in the same way that Rachel objectifies herself in her later fantasies³⁰ and that Marian McAlpin in Atwood's The Edible Woman suddenly begins thinking of herself in the third person. Thus the reader becomes aware that the thinking and feeling Stacey is usually very different from the woman who acts. Laurence admits that she feels a special interest in the style of The Fire-Dwellers, saying that its form is "wider, including as it does a certain amount of third-person narration as well as Stacey's idiomatic running inner commentary and her somewhat less idiomatic fantasies,

dreams, memories."³¹ The form may be wider, but it is also tighter, and may suggest that Laurence is coming to accept a Jamesian principle, that "the first person, in the long piece, is a form foredoomed to looseness."³² Indeed the narration in The Fire-Dwellers is similar to James' concept of "central intelligence," and Laurence, by centering her subject in Stacey's consciousness--"put the heaviest weight into that scale"³³--yet making her aware of "the things that are not herself," almost seems to be writing expressly according to James. The reader has the advantage of a subjective view without the complete submission to it required by first-person narration, achieving, as James hoped, the "maximum of intensity with the minimum of strain."³⁴ It is probably this intensity without the strain that explains why Gotlieb lauds the book as "faultless in its entry into the mind of a middle-aged housewife;"³⁵ because the external activities are treated in a third-person framework, there is no burden of carrying both thought and action in the character's consciousness, as A Jest of God was compelled to do. Only The Stone Angel has resolved the problems with first-person narration as effectively as has The Fire-Dwellers.

An examination of Laurence's use of the first person, however, is not the only, nor perhaps the best, way to approach her use of the narrator. Booth, speaking of the inadequacy of "our traditional classification of 'point of view' into three or four kinds, variables only of the

'person' and the degree of omniscience," says: "Perhaps the most overworked distinction is that of person. To say that a story is told in the first or the third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to specific effects."³⁶ For Booth, a much more practical distinction is one between a reliable and unreliable narrator; since it is literary effect with which discussions of point of view are concerned, if the narrator proves to be untrustworthy then "the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed."³⁷ A narrator is reliable, Booth explains, "when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work (which is to say, the implied author's norms), unreliable when he does not. . . . It is most often a matter of what James calls inconscience; the narrator is mistaken, or he believes himself to have qualities which the author denies him."³⁸

That Laurence's narrators would readily lend themselves to an examination from this perspective is easy to see, for not only are all her characters, with the possible exception of Vanessa, in varying states of emotional upset, but the use of the first person assures the reader that what he is reading is necessarily biased and filtered through the very subjective lens of individual perception and interpretation. It is significant that some of the most interesting works involving an unreliable narrator are written

in the first person--for example, Ford's The Good Soldier, James' The Turn of the Screw, or most of the confessional novels.³⁹ Although the first person, then, may, as Booth says, in itself "tell us nothing of importance," it indicates to the reader that this highly restricted and subjective vision is a questionable assessment of the facts, and that the reader was meant to evaluate the validity of the narrator's judgement in light of his own understanding of the situation. And, as Edel says of Durrell's Justine, who "looks out at us from five mirrors at the same time," we are "transposed into a relative rather than a fixed vision."⁴⁰

Laurence also frequently has her characters look out at the reader, and themselves, from mirrors, and her use of these mirror-images is perhaps the most interesting aspect of the unreliable subjective view. Although Booth deplores the "many cumbersome 'mirror-views' in modern fiction" and seems to prefer the maintenance of "a reliable narrator's voice independent of the character's subjective vision,"⁴¹ Laurence is able to present significant insights into her characters by what they report seeing in the mirror. If objective detail is sacrificed--and it never seems to be entirely--it is for a more accurate subjective vision. Durrell quotes the Marquis de Sade as saying: "The mirror sees the man as beautiful, the mirror loves the man; another mirror sees the man as frightful and hates him; and it is always the same being who produces the impressions."⁴²

Laurence's mirrors alternate between loving and hating the people they reflect, although they tend more to hate than to love. In A Jest of God, for example, Rachel's glimpses of herself in the mirror are almost always unflattering. She never seems able to "succeed in avoiding" her eyes in the mirror, and is continually confronted by images of herself in bedroom mirrors, in hall mirrors, in cafe mirrors, in store windows; she sees looking back at her "the narrow angular face . . . the grey eyes too wide for it" (JG, 16); "the featureless face, the tallness, a thin stiff white feather like a goose's feather" (JG, 153); "this giraffe woman, this lank scamperer" (JG, 75); a "thin streak of a person" (JG, 29). Yet, early in the novel, the reader is indirectly cautioned against accepting Rachel's description of her mirror self as any kind of objective assessment: she wonders, "do I see my face falsely? How do I know how it looks to anyone else?" (JG, 16) "Do I have good bones? I can't tell. I'm no judge" (JG, 17). Thus the reader must learn to question Rachel's view of herself, and although he may not receive from Rachel's mirror images any objective details other than that she is tall and thin, he receives much more significant information from her unreliable testimony--that is, her attitude to her appearance.

In The Stone Angel and The Fire-Dwellers, Laurence adds another dimension to her use of the mirror-image and to her use of the mirror that, like Rachel's, "sees the

man as frightful and hates him." This is her use of the double vision, of the juxtaposition of a favorable self-image with a damning one, and in both novels it tends to become a confrontation between the young and the old, the then and the now. This occurs constantly in The Fire-Dwellers, where the Stacey in the present must learn to accept the fact that her mirror image is no longer that of herself at seventeen. At one point, early in the novel, she "strips and looks at herself in the mirror," and there is an immediate flashback to the younger Stacey, running down the stairs at home in Manawaka, as she "paused in flight like a hummingbird or helicopter and sneaked a glance into the mirror halfway down." Tormented by realizing now that "I was actually pretty--why didn't I know it then?" Stacey confronts her older self in the mirror: "--Oh Cleopatra. You old sway-back. Four kids have altered me. The stretch marks look like little silver worms in parallel procession across my belly and my thighs" (FD, 18-9). Although the most frequent use of this double vision with Stacey involves images of her younger self, there are also effective juxtapositions of the present Stacey with the younger girls around her. On the bus, the girl sitting beside her makes her acutely aware of her own mirror image, of this "slightly too short and too amply rumped woman" (FD, 12). On the peace march, the "green corduroy girl" beside her makes her visualize herself again as "this slightly too short woman, slightly heavy in the hips, no longer young" (FD, 276).

Perhaps the most effective use of the double vision, however, occurs in that excellently-written section of the novel where Stacey, trying to recapture her image of Stacey Cameron, "spinning like light, whirling laughter across a polished floor," dances in the basement to the old Tommy Dorsey record. Before she does so, she "goes upstairs to the bedroom and looks at herself in the full-length mirror," removes the dress with the print "in the form of small clocks, all of whose hands indicate five minutes before either noon or midnight," and puts on "a pair of tight-fitting green velvet slacks and a purple overblouse." She cannot, however, keep the hands of the Cinderella clock from striking midnight by removing the dress, and when, a few hours later, she sees Katie, "simple and intricate as grass," dancing in the same room to her own records, all the mirror images of Stacey--of herself at seventeen, of herself as she felt she looked as she danced, of Katie dancing now--are evoked in the bitter and self-caricaturing image that flashes into her mind: "Stacey MacAindra, thirty-nine, hips ass and face heavier than once, shamrock velvet pants, petunia-purple blouse, cheap gilt sandals high-heeled, prancing squirming jiggling" (FD, 137).

In The Stone Angel, the juxtaposing of two mirror images, Hagar Currie and Hagar Shipley, is also common, and in several respects it serves the same function as do the two images of Stacey Cameron and Stacey MacAindra. Like

Stacey, remembering herself as a girl looking into the mirror, Hagar, "not wanting to be seen looking," realizes she was "a handsome girl. . . . A pity I didn't know it then" (SA, 60). And, also like Stacey, she finds it difficult to accept her aging, her turning, as Stacey turns into a swaybacked Cleopatra, into "the Egyptian, not dancing now with rowanberries in her hair, but sadly altered" (SA, 40). She is even more merciless than Stacey in her consideration of her physical disintegration:

I give a sideways glance at the mirror, and see a puffed face purpled with veins as though someone had scribbled over the skin with an indelible pencil. The skin itself is the silverish white of the creatures one fancies must live under the sea where the sun never reaches. Below the eyes the shadows bloom as though two soft black petals had been stuck there. The hair which should by rights be black is yellowed white, like damask stored too long in a damp basement. (SA, 79)

Yet there is always present in the mirror the young Hagar, looking out of the same eyes, existing in the same image and in the same self as the old Hagar; for she feels, if she were to "approach the mirror softly, take it by surprise, I would see there again that Hagar with the shining hair, the dark-maned colt" (SA, 42). Thus, she says, "when I look in my mirror and beyond the changing shell that houses me, I see the eyes of Hagar Currie, the same dark eyes as when I first began to remember and to notice myself. . . . The eyes change least of all" (SA, 38). Her ability to look "beyond the changing shell," to see the one person in the two images of past and present, is something like

what Peter Walsh does as he sees Mrs. Dalloway again after his long absence in India. The memory and the present person become the same, and Peter sees Clarissa as someone almost outside time, someone who partakes of the present and at the same time transcends it to remain a living part of their mutual past. Clarissa herself, however, thrusting herself, almost desperately, into what Schaefer calls "a Pateresque love of the moment,"⁴³ achieves in her mirror a kind of denial of clock time that neither Stacey nor Hagar can quite manage to do:

Clarissa (crossing to the dressing table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it there--the very moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all other mornings, . . . collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass), seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself.⁴⁴

Neither Rachel, Stacey, nor Hagar can quite accept their existing mirror image, can collect "the whole of [themselves] at one point" and make the mirror love them. There is always a sense of despair in what the mirror reveals, and, particularly for Stacey and Hagar, a desire to see a much earlier image, one which represents not only youth's physical beauty, but its freedom and enthusiasm as well. Whether or not the reader is expected to believe the evaluations Stacey and Hagar make of their mirror images may not be as important as understanding the attitudes to the viewers that the mirrors also reflect. What the reader is likely expected to conclude is simply that Stacey, who, according to the third

person, looks much like the average middle-aged housewife, generally has a negative attitude about her present appearance, and tends to emphasize her worst points; and that Hagar likewise despairs over what is probably a normal enough condition for a woman of ninety.

The use of the mirror-image, then, is perhaps Laurence's most successful use of subjective narration, presenting both objective physical details⁴⁵ and the character's own emotional reactions to what she sees. Laurence's use of the double-image as a function of the unreliable narrator extends, of course, beyond the mirror image to a more general use of what Thomas calls, in The Stone Angel, the "double-exposure." The use of the two narrative levels especially facilitates this juxtaposing of the old and young Hagar,⁴⁶ but as Thomas points out, it is in the world of appearances and realities that the double-exposure technique is especially useful, showing the reader

Hagar, as she thinks she is and as she really is; Hagar, as she reads her motives in the past and as they seem to us; Marvin, as she sees him and as we gradually comprehend him to be; Doris, often intolerable by Hagar's standards and by ours, but just as often, to us, a tired, middle-aged woman who loves her husband enough to bear with an impossible mother-in-law.⁴⁷

Hagar can be as ruthlessly honest with herself as to admit, "I can't keep my mouth shut" (SA, 90), and "I'm unreasonable. Who could get along with me?" (SA, 99). She is perceptive enough to realize that "things never look the same from the outside as they do from the inside" (SA, 249), and

finally that "pride was my wilderness, and the demon that led me there was fear" (SA, 292). Yet beside this Hagar exists the obviously-fallible woman who insists, "of course I'm all right, perfectly all right" (SA, 33); who sees nothing in Doris beyond the greedy "pouch-faced gopher;"⁴⁸ and who decides Marvin and Doris will not appreciate receiving the sapphire ring: "a chunk of junk jewellery, that's all it is to them" (SA, 280). This is also the Hagar who was--and still is as she narrates--so short-sighted that of Marvin's letters all she can say is, "he wrote home once a month, and his letters were always very poorly spelled" (SA, 130).

It is relatively easy, however, for the reader to accept these two contradictory Hagars, both because of the two temporally-different narrative levels and because Hagar, as a woman of ninety, can be allowed the contradictions and contrariness of old age. The reader is willing to shrug off her inconsistencies with a Whitmanesque acceptance of her:

Do I contradict myself?
Very well then I contradict myself,
(I am large, I contain multitudes.)⁴⁹

Yet this is possible only because the reader is usually fully aware of her unreliability as a narrator. The reader, that is, is fully in what Booth calls "secret communion" with the author, sharing knowledge about the fallible first-person narrator. "We travel with the silent author," says Booth; he may "wink and nudge, but he may not speak;" he and the

reader are "secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting."⁵⁰ Laurence and the reader are indeed withdrawn from Hagar's narrating "I," and can share a distinct perspective. This sense of "collusion" is present in all of Laurence's novels, even in A Bird in the House, but The Stone Angel contains perhaps the most obvious evidence of its use.

In presenting the double-exposures of Stacey, Rachel, and Vanessa, Laurence also uses a kind of collusion between herself as author and the reader. There is certainly a similarity between the appearance-reality, the deception-truth distinctions that arise in The Stone Angel and those that occur in the other three novels; and there is likewise a similarity in the Laurence who "winks and nudges" behind Hagar's back and the Laurence who writes about Stacey, Vanessa, and Rachel. With Rachel in particular, the reader is constantly aware that her judgements are neurotic and unreliable. This becomes obvious after the first few pages: the reader is told Rachel as a child was "scared of not pleasing," and it soon becomes apparent that she has not changed much, for she is still overly-conscious of her image in others' eyes. "God forbid that I should turn into an eccentric," she thinks in horror; "Am I beginning to talk in that simper tone," she wonders; "Now I've spoken more sharply than necessary," she reprimands herself; "My arms . . . seem so long and skinny," she thinks critically; "I

oughtn't to feel that way," she tells herself about James; "I shouldn't try to avoid her eyes," she thinks as she sees Calla. All this confronts the reader before he finishes page three, and it is easy to conclude from the very beginning of the novel that Rachel's lack of self-confidence and her hyper-sensitive nature can easily distort objective reality. Hence the reader, involved as he may become in her life and perceptions, can still see her as she cannot see herself, and must judge situations from his own perspective.⁵² Thus, when Rachel says of her mother's bridge games, "I don't begrudge it to her No one decent would" (JG, 15), the reader sees that Rachel does of course begrudge it, and that she feels a great deal of guilt about it. And when she says, "It doesn't concern me, what she thinks" (JG, 55); "I'm not worked up in the slightest. . . . It's not of any real importance" (JG, 82); "It would have been easy" (JG, 129); "The idea hardly crossed my mind" (JG, 150); it is painfully obvious to the reader that all these things do concern her, and are important. With Stacey, too, the reader is expected to see more of her than she sees herself, to question her assessments of herself: "I had everything I always wanted" (FD, 76). The support of Stacey's thoughts by the third-person narration, however, somewhat reduces the sense of reader-author collusion, as the turning to a more impersonal point of view tends to objectify Stacey for the reader.

In A Bird in the House, the reader is also expected to see beyond those things that the child Vanessa sees, but the collusion here is more between the reader and the adult Vanessa, who shares (perhaps is) the author's perspective. Vanessa the adult, then, must be seen as a reliable narrator, with a "calmly consistent viewpoint,"⁵³ although Laurence herself admits that her own attitude, especially toward her grandfather, changed between writing the first stories and the last: "I think I honestly kept on disliking him until I'd got all the way through those stories . . . and when I'd finished the last story I realized not only that I didn't dislike him anymore, but that there were things about him that I greatly admired."⁵⁴ The reader, however, has little choice but to accept the validity of the narrator's judgement throughout, and if the evolution of understanding occurs in both of the "two characters" instead of just the child Vanessa, it does not seem to affect the development of the novel. The young Vanessa is presented as a fairly reliable narrator, both because her observations are the memoirs of the older Vanessa and because her ego frequently disappears and she becomes merely an innocent medium for relating the adult tensions. Her main function seems to be more as a reporter than as a participant, and thus her presentation of the characters, usually through their conversations, which she often too conveniently overhears,⁵⁵ is one the reader can accept as valid. Her judgements are

ones the reader is expected to accept too, at that time, and although as she grows older and her perspectives apparently change, what she says at any given point is usually legitimate, perhaps because the reader can never totally accept her credibility as a child instead of an adult. At any rate, the "silent author" who may "wink and nudge" is less obviously present in A Bird in the House than she is in the other novels.

The author-reader collusion in The Fire-Dwellers and in A Jest of God is, however, of less significance in understanding Stacey and Rachel than is their attempt throughout to understand themselves, and their ability to see themselves ironically. The irony that results from the double-exposure technique in The Stone Angel is irony that is produced largely by collusion of author-reader; in The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God it is irony produced by the main characters themselves, directed against themselves. In this regard, the two novels show a kinship with the confessional novel, which not only "maintains the author's detachment from his hero," but also "gives the hero a weapon with which to destroy any romantic notions which might lure him away from the central purpose of his confession."⁵⁶ Thus, whereas in The Stone Angel the reader tends to see the irony somewhat the same way as Mark Schorer sees it in The Good Soldier, in which "the fracture between the character of the event as we feel it to be and the character of the

narrator as he reports the event to us is the essential irony,"⁵⁷ in The Fire-Dwellers and A Jest of God, the irony frequently arises out of the characters' own ironical and witty observations of themselves. Stacey sees the contradictions and the uncertainties in herself; she refuses to allow herself to rationalize, and berates herself mercilessly when she thinks she might be doing so: "you saw it all right but you couldn't take it" (FD, 289). She is, as Phyllis Grosskurth says, "too honest to indulge in self-pity or self-delusion,"⁵⁸ and in her bitter conversations with herself, she always catches herself on the brink of lying, of wallowing in self-pity. "Do we deceive ourselves by any chance, Stacey, doll? Very well, then, we deceive ourselves. Bugger off, voice" (FD, 205). "Well, poor you. Let's all have a good cry. What would you do if you weren't on duty, bitch? Contemplate? Write poetry? Oh shut up" (FD, 172). Her diagnosis of her particular malaise is likewise handled with the same witty cynicism: "I am either suffering from delayed adolescence or premature menopausal symptoms, most likely both" (FD, 87).

Rachel likewise can see herself ironically, and is aware of the neurotic person she is; like her sister, she refuses to wallow in self-pity and can never get away for long with lying to herself. She can fantasize only up to a point before she confronts the lie, before she admits, "I'm dramatizing." Recounting in her mind a conversation

she had with Stacey, she says: "I told her so. My voice was not upset in the slightest. 'Don't be ridiculous,' I said. I didn't, though. I didn't say a word. I don't know why I didn't. Stupid. Stupid" (JG, 21). Similarly, she reconstructs an awkward experience with Nick, but cannot deceive herself into believing she behaved gracefully: "For a moment it really is soothing, and I can almost believe it happened that way. But the moment evaporates, and I am left with the cold knowledge of how I actually saw it happen, myself rearing up at the door sound, rising gawkily like a tame goose trying to fly" (JG, 130). And she can exaggerate only to a point Nick's appreciation of her before she cuts herself short with an accusing "a lie" (JG, 143). Rachel, like Stacey, refuses to rationalize, and the clearness with which she sometimes sees herself often is both more ironical and insightful than those instances in which the author and reader conspire for similar ironies or revelations. Rachel knows what she does, even if she is not certain why and, like the confessional hero, she is articulate about her despair, even if only to herself. She says, for example: "I honestly do not know why I feel the daft sting of imagined embarrassments. The ones that occur are more than plenty, God knows. I must not let myself think like this. I don't know why I do. Unless to visualize something infinitely worse than anything that could possibly happen, so that whatever happens may seem not so bad in

comparison" (JG, 61). Thus, although Harlow criticizes the novel for its lack of irony, and then says that the reader "simply gets tired of listening to Rachel taking pot-shots at herself,"⁵⁹ the self-irony, the inner-directed irony that is the main ammunition of these "pot-shots" most adequately compensates for the absence of a more objective viewpoint.

By the end of the novel, however, the irony, both the author's and Rachel's, abates as Rachel reaches a more realistic acceptance of herself. She realizes she must leave Manawaka, that she is the mother now, that regardless of how many bones must be broken, she will learn to walk. Similarly, Stacey can admit by the end of her novel that "I won't be twenty-one again" (FD, 308), and that the dancing must now go on only in her head. Vanessa likewise develops a compassionate maturity and understanding, both of herself and in her assessment of others, especially her grandfather. And Hagar reaches probably the most important understanding of all, for she discovers, albeit through a lie, her capacity for selfless love. Each of the characters, in her own way, has learned to accept herself and her mortality, and has gained a certain kind of wisdom based on harsh and final experience. Hagar, Stacey, Rachel, Vanessa--all learn through suffering; with Hagar and Vanessa perhaps their knowledge comes too late; with Stacey and Rachel there seems hope that what they have learned will save both themselves

and those they love. In any case, if one accepts Dostoevsky's statement that suffering is the sole origin of consciousness, certainly Laurence's Manawaka heroines have reached, as their novels close, consciousness.

FOOTNOTES

Introduction

¹Hornsey, "The Skull Beneath the Skin," 5.

Chapter I

¹Frye, "Myth, Fiction and Displacement," 33.

²Meyerhoff, Time in Literature, 80.

³Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 140, 141.

⁴Laurence, "Sources," 80.

⁵Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 140.

⁶Laurence, "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," 58.

⁷Meyerhoff, Time in Literature, 81.

⁸New, Introduction to The Stone Angel, viii.

⁹It is interesting, too, that as Abraham rejects the bondswoman Hagar in favor of Sarah, so too does Hagar Shipley, when she returns to Bram, now remind him of Clara, "his fat and cow-like first wife."

¹⁰Laurence, The Stone Angel, 292. All subsequent references to this novel will appear in the text and be abbreviated as SA.

¹¹New, Introduction to The Stone Angel, ix. To do New justice, however, he does say earlier that Laurence does not simply exploit biblical archetypes, but that "having seen Hagar as an essentially tragic figure, she has placed her in a modern setting and explored her point of view" (viii, ix). This still suggests, however, that Laurence's Hagar, or the Hagar-type, is devoid of free will, and is controlled, not by her own pride, or even by Laurence as her creator, but by the inevitable demands of the biblical story.

¹²Laurence, "A Conversation," 56.

¹³See Genesis 21:17. "What aileth thee, Hagar? Fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the child where he is."

¹⁴Read, "The Maze of Life," 12.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Genesis 30: 1 and 2.

¹⁷Laurence, A Jest of God, 148. All subsequent references to this novel will appear in the text and be abbreviated as JG.

¹⁸Stedmond, "Fiction: A Jest of God," 382.

¹⁹Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, 167. All subsequent references to this novel will be included in the text and abbreviated as FD.

²⁰Hornsey, "The Skull," 1.

²¹Ibid., 4.

²²Ibid., 1-2.

²³Laurence, quoted by Wigmore, "Margaret Laurence," 54.

²⁴Spettigue, "Canadian Fiction," 723.

²⁵Robert Browning, "Rabbi Ben Ezra," ll. 2, 4-6.

²⁶Laurence, A Bird in the House, 110. All subsequent references to this novel will be included in the text and abbreviated as BH.

²⁷Hornsey, "The Skull," 16.

²⁸Ibid., 17.

²⁹Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 50-1.

³⁰Ibid., 42.

³¹Brown, Rhythm in the Novel, 56, 57.

³²A comparison with Milton's angel in "Lycidas" is the natural one, and, as New points out, the eyeless stone angel in the Manawaka cemetery is not Milton's archangel, looking homeward with compassion. Perhaps a more apt comparison is with Thomas Wolfe's marble angel in Look Homeward, Angel. The "heavy simpering figure of an angel" (p. 15) which Gant places at the door of his shop becomes the significant expanding symbol of the novel, and the strange love-hate that Gant felt for his angel is rather like Hagar's. The Stone Angel could almost have used this description: "it had come

from Carrara in Italy, and it held a stone lily delicately in one hand. The other hand was lifted in benediction, it was poised clumsily upon the ball of one phthistic foot, and its stupid white face wore a smile of soft stone idiocy" (p. 221).

³³Brown, Rhythm in the Novel, 57.

³⁴The Stone Angel, 304. See also Genesis 32:26. Marvin's clinging to Hagar as she lies dying, demanding a blessing, seems to recall not only Genesis but also the line from Dylan Thomas that occurs just before the two quoted by Laurence in her epigraph. Thomas, like Marvin, clings to a dying parent and cries:

Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray.
Do not go gentle into that good night.
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

³⁵Faulkner, The Mansion, 398, 407.

³⁶Proverbs 1:26.

³⁷Psalms 14:1.

³⁸Brown, Rhythm in the Novel, 57.

³⁹Bede, Ecclesiastical History, 95.

⁴⁰Laurence, "Sources," 83.

⁴¹Ibid., 81.

⁴²Ibid., 82.

⁴³Ibid., 83.

⁴⁴Laurence, quoted by Wigmore, "Margaret Laurence," 52.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 57.

⁴⁷Lacey (pseudonym), "Poetry Chronicle II," 83-4.

⁴⁸Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 57.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Buckler, The Mountain and the Valley, 277.

⁵¹quoted by Klein, "A Discipline of Nobility," 207.

⁵²Galloway, "Clown and Saint," 47.

⁵³Laurence, quoted by Wigmore, "Margaret Laurence," 28.

⁵⁴Wolfe, Look Homeward, Angel, 521.

⁵⁵Sartre, Nausea, 90-1.

⁵⁶Lewis, Main Street, 35.

⁵⁷Hornsey, "The Skull," 17.

⁵⁸Laurence, "A Conversation," 54.

⁵⁹Wolfe, You Can't Go Home Again, 75, 113, 305.

⁶⁰Laurence, "A Conversation," 54.

⁶¹Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," 13. See also "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," 62.

⁶²Watt, The Rise of the Novel, 26.

Chapter II

¹Stein, Composition as Explanation, 30.

²James, Preface to Roderick Hudson, xv.

³Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 65. The German terms were suggested by Mr. Wiebe, but they make the same distinction as do those of Mendilow and Mann.

⁴Mann, The Magic Mountain, 541. See also the original, Der Zauberberg, II, 301.

⁵Proust, Within a Budding Grove, part one, Vol. II of Remembrance of Things Past, 76.

⁶Harvey, "Time and Identity" in his Character and the Novel, 110.

⁷Laurence, quoted by Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 10.

⁸It must be remembered, of course, that Grove had the additional problem of condensing the book from a much longer version.

⁹Dobbs, "A Certain Relish for Tears," 26.

¹⁰Woodcock, "Jungle and Prairie," 84.

¹¹Thompson, "Margaret Laurence: A Bird in the House," 108.

¹²Ford Madox Ford, quoted by Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 191.

¹³Virginia Woolf accomplishes much the same thing, but in a very different manner, in the "Time Passes" section of To the Lighthouse. Laurence always keeps her two time levels parallel, whereas Woolf moves ahead chronologically, showing the passage of time by using the process of natural decay, and thus avoiding an obvious time gap, or an awkward outline of changes.

¹⁴Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," 14.

¹⁵See pp. 65-7 of this thesis.

¹⁶"Books: The Stone Angel," Canadian Author and Bookman, 17.

¹⁷Godfrey, "For Bonfires/For Burning," 93.

¹⁸Daiches, Virginia Woolf, 66. Daiches' concept of time-montage might be paralleled by the time-shift, or what Conrad and Ford call "chronological looping."

¹⁹See also p. 86 of the novel.

²⁰Thompson, "Book Review: The Fire-Dwellers," 72.

²¹Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel, 57.

²²Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 94-8.

²³Laurence, quoted by Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 10.

²⁴Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 97.

²⁵Ibid., 95.

²⁶Roth, Portnoy's Complaint, 9.

²⁷Grove, Settlers of the Marsh, 97. Grove uses this transference again when he describes the prison in the present tense, and also when he narrates Niels' reunion with Ellen.

²⁸Godfrey, "For Bonfires," 93.

²⁹Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 36.

³⁰Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 106. This distance between the "two characters" of such a novel is discussed later in this chapter, pp. 75-9.

³¹Godfrey, "For Bonfires," 94.

³²The fault lies not so much with Laurence's use of the present tense, however, as with her combination of it with the first person. See pp. 84-6 of this thesis.

³³Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel, 200.

³⁴Eliot, "Burnt Norton," Part I, in Collected Poems, ll. 46-8.

³⁵New, Introduction to The Stone Angel, x.

³⁶Eliot, "East Coker," in Collected Poems, ll. 1, 211.

³⁷Woolf, To the Lighthouse, 310.

³⁸Gide, quoted by Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 209.

³⁹"Objective" here, it must be noted, is not used in the way Harvey uses the term, which he considers synonymous with "organic" time, and opposed to both the mechanical and mathematical time referred to by Mumford, and the subjective time of our memory and imagination. See Harvey, 104-5.

⁴⁰Mann, The Magic Mountain, 66.

⁴¹Woolf, Orlando, 91.

⁴²Proust, Swann's Way, part one, Vol. I of Remembrance of Things Past, 116.

⁴³Faulkner, cited by Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel, 168.

⁴⁴Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," in The Portable Matthew Arnold, ll. 85-6.

⁴⁵Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel, 22.

⁴⁶It is also a distinction made between the stream-of-consciousness novel and the confessional novel; in the latter, the selective process is the hero's, not the author's,

and there is no attempt made to create an illusion of random flow. Axthelm makes the distinction (p. 11)--and, it must be noted, seriously misquotes Edel.

⁴⁷Dudek, The First Person in Literature, 39.

⁴⁸Woolf, The Common Reader, 190.

⁴⁹Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 105.

⁵⁰Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness, 36.

⁵¹Ibid., 35.

⁵²Ibid., 25.

⁵³Joyce, Ulysses, 776.

⁵⁴Humphrey, Stream of Consciousness, 37.

⁵⁵Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 80.

⁵⁶Meyerhoff, Time in Literature, 22.

⁵⁷Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 221.

⁵⁸Woolf, Orlando, 74.

⁵⁹Remembered events, however, do follow each other in a causal relationship; there is an orderly progression of B follows A, C follows B, etc. The point is, as Meyerhoff explains, "that this peculiar order of the inner life appears as, or must be judged as, a form of disorder when it is compared with objective temporal sequence" (p. 23).

⁶⁰Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," 14.

⁶¹Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 38.

⁶²Proust, Swann's Way, part one, Vol. I of Remembrance of Things Past, 61.

⁶³Robertson, "An Artist's Progress," 54.

⁶⁴Godfrey, "For Bonfires," 93.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Individual stories, however, move ahead in time beyond the fictional present of the next story (see pp. 34-5, 48-9 of this thesis), but the general movement of Vanessa's

memory is chronological rather than associative, both within the separate stories and in the novel as a whole.

⁶⁷Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 219.

⁶⁸Meyerhoff, Time in Literature, 48.

⁶⁹Thompson, "Margaret Laurence: A Bird in the House," 109.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 108.

⁷¹Mendilow includes an interesting discussion of these authors, and their problems concerning the double focus, in a section called "The Time Locus of the Pseudo-Author," pp. 89-96.

⁷²Richardson, quoted by Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 90-1.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴*Ibid.*

⁷⁵Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 55-6.

⁷⁶Laurence herself might question the consistency of her viewpoint; see p. 102 of this thesis.

⁷⁷Mitchell, Jake and the Kid, 172-3.

⁷⁸Dobbs, "A Certain Relish for Tears," 27.

⁷⁹Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 91.

⁸⁰Thompson, "Margaret Laurence: A Bird in the House," 109.

⁸¹Thomas points out a similar concern, of the child "on his journey into experience," in The Tomorrow-Tamer. See Thomas, pp. 24-5, 27-8.

⁸²Leviant, "Fiction's Refusal to Expire," 28.

Chapter III

¹This use of the first person seems a particular characteristic of her Canadian fiction. This Side Jordan is in the third person, and The Tomorrow-Tamer has only three of its ten stories in the first person.

²Hildick, Thirteen Types of Narrative.

³Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 308.

⁴Axthelm, The Modern Confessional Novel, 8.

⁵Ibid., 9.

⁶The difference between confessional and stream-of-consciousness novels is suggested in Chapter II, and Axthelm makes the point as well (p. 9).

⁷There are other obvious differences, notably one arising from the intellectual hero both Frye and Axthelm demand. The confessional hero, says Axthelm, "becomes increasingly intellectual, capable of philosophic meditations and prone to literary allusions" (p. 9). Certainly Laurence's characters fall far short of this qualification; although Rachel may be "prone to literary allusions," and Hagar is obviously not ignorant, Stacey's philosophic meditations are limited to such comments as, "My taste isn't anywhere. Between my legs, maybe" (FD, 139).

⁸Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 107.

⁹Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 53.

¹⁰Duffy, "Critical Sympathies," 80.

¹¹Harlow, "Lack of Distance," 74.

¹²New, Introduction to The Stone Angel, iv.

¹³Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 51.

¹⁴Duffy, "Critical Sympathies," 81.

¹⁵New, Introduction to The Stone Angel, iv.

¹⁶Braddock, "The Supreme Communicator," 57.

¹⁷Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," 14.

¹⁸Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 109.

¹⁹If the reader can accept seeing things through Rachel's eyes, he can accept the characters of her mother and Nick as she sees them and he would not feel "obscurely resentful," as Thomas says (p. 51), at such things as not having Nick's snapshot fully explained.

²⁰Braddock, "The Supreme Communicator," 57.

²¹New, Introduction to The Stone Angel, iv.

²²Stedmond, "Fiction: A Jest of God," 382.

²³Harlow, "Lack of Distance," 74.

²⁴Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, 307.

²⁵Thompson, "Margaret Laurence: A Bird in the House,"
110.

²⁶See pp. 75-7 of this thesis.

²⁷Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 107.

²⁸The limited omniscient view can include, as is discussed on p. 64 of this thesis, both objective descriptions of action and much more subjective reactions and observations by Stacey.

²⁹Mendilow, Time and the Novel, 114.

³⁰See pp. 42-3 of this thesis.

³¹Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," 15.

³²James, Preface to The Ambassadors, 11.

³³James, Preface to The Portrait of a Lady, xxiii.

³⁴*Ibid.*, xxviii.

³⁵Gotlieb, "On Margaret Laurence," 77.

³⁶Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 149, 150.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 158.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 158-9.

³⁹A Canadian novel that uses an unreliable first-person narrator is Sinclair Ross' As For Me and My House; Roy Daniells, in his introduction to the novel, considers the narrator, Mrs. Bentley, as "pure gold and wholly credible," but if one questions the objective truth of her statements, she emerges as something quite different from, and much more interesting than, the "candid, selfless, and receptive soul" that Daniells believes her to be.

⁴⁰Edel, The Modern Psychological Novel, 201.

⁴¹Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 172.

⁴²Durrell, Balthazar in The Alexandria Quartet, 208.

⁴³Schaefer, The Three-fold Nature of Reality, 94.

⁴⁴Woolf, Mrs. Dalloway, 54.

⁴⁵The reader learns, for example, that Rachel is tall (see p. 93 of this thesis), that Stacey is overweight, that Hagar is wrinkled and white-haired; such details, filtered as they may be through individual perceptions, recur frequently enough to be accepted as "givens," if not of the person externally, then of that person's psychological self.

⁴⁶See the discussion of the "two characters" in Chapter II.

⁴⁷Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 40.

⁴⁸The Stone Angel, 58. Hagar continually sees other people in terms of animals: Doris is "a calving cow," a "sow in labour," a "scared duck," a "shot partridge," a flea; Bram snorts "like a great gray walrus," and his daughters are "like heifers, like lumps of unrendered fat;" Mavis is "plump as a pullet," and the women in the nursing home are variously described as mosquitoes and vultures. Most of all, however, she describes herself in animal terms; she remembers her young self as "the dark-maned colt," and by contrast she sees herself now as the "old malevolent crow," the "fattened calf," an "earthworm impaled," an "injured dog," an "old hawk," a crab, a fish.

⁴⁹Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," Part 51, in Leaves of Grass, ll. 1324-6.

⁵⁰Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, 300, 304.

⁵¹See also p. 93 of this thesis.

⁵²See page 86 for a further discussion of reader involvement with Rachel.

⁵³Thomas, Margaret Laurence, 56.

⁵⁴Laurence, quoted by Wigmore, "Margaret Laurence," 52.

⁵⁵for example, pp. 76, 85, 186 of the novel.

⁵⁶Axthelm, The Modern Confessional Novel, 11.

⁵⁷Schorer, "An Interpretation" in Ford's The Good Soldier, vii.

⁵⁸Grosskurth, "Wise and Gentle," 91-2.

⁵⁹Harlow, "Lack of Distance," 74.

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